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ABSTRACT

This guide to rural learning is intended to help those developing learning opportunities in the United Kingdom countryside--teachers, program organizers, project and development workers, and health and housing workers. Section 1 supplies up-to-date facts and figures and useful information about living in the rural context. It highlights issues that may provide the basis for useful learning activities. A checklist is provided to build up one's own local picture. Section 2 describes useful and relevant approaches aimed at developing rural learning. Topics are context, adult learning, what people want to learn, getting involved, partnerships and providers, networking, development and progression, and looking to the future. Section 3 provides practical suggestions for putting ideas into practice. It covers methods to define needs; village appraisals; supporting adult learning: rules and regulations; publicity and communication; effective working and evaluation; organizing events; and time and managing oneself. Each subsection begins with a short explanation; "quick tips" summarize the main points. For Sections 1-3, questions are provided at the end of key sub-sections to get one thinking about specific issues and responses in relation to one's own area. Section 4, Resources, has two parts. Part A is a "Who's Who in Education" that can be customized for one's own reference. Part B contains a list of agencies, books, and Web sites. (YLB)

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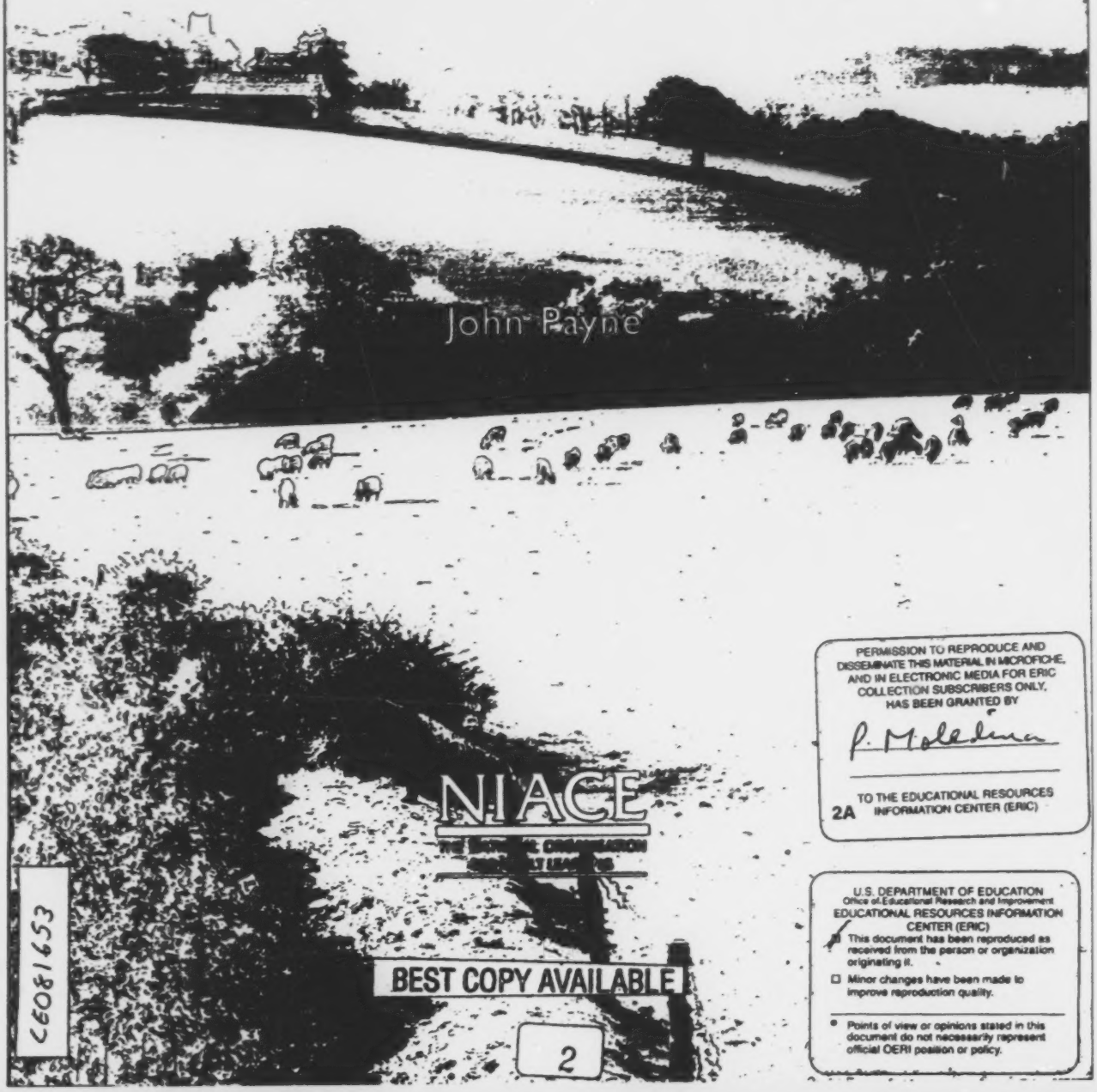
RURAL LEARNING

A practical guide to developing learning opportunities in the countryside



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RURAL LEARNING

RURAL LEARNING

A practical guide to developing learning opportunities in the countryside

John Payne

NIACE
THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR ADULT LEARNING

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NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties and disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

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John Payne ◦ Frome, Somerset

October 2000

Rural Learning

Introduction

This practical guide to rural learning will help those who are developing learning opportunities in the countryside. This might include teachers and programme organisers but it will also be relevant to project and development workers, health and housing workers, and all those in the voluntary sector with an educational brief.

For easy use and access to information we have organised the guide into four separate sections:

One: Living in the Countryside – some up-to-date facts and figures and useful information about living in the rural context.

Two: Approaches and Developments – useful and relevant approaches aimed at developing rural learning.

Three: Getting Organised – practical suggestions about putting ideas into practice.

Four: Resources – suggestions for further reading, additional learning materials and useful contacts.

The guide makes extensive use of actual examples to help illustrate suggestions and ideas. Questions are included at the end of key sub-sections in the text to get you thinking about specific issues and responses in relation to your own area. References relating to some of the useful further reading and resources included in Section Four are included throughout the text.

We hope you find *Rural Learning* a useful reference and rich source of ideas for developing learning in rural areas.

SECTION ONE

Living in the Countryside

Introduction

A lot of people live in the countryside. Some of them have well-paid jobs in a nearby town or city, own cars to ferry children to and from school and leisure activities and parties, and live in comfortable, well-heated houses. Others are unemployed or working unpaid as carers of children or elderly relatives, frequently dependent on the vagaries of rural public transport, and often live in damp, rented accommodation.

It is easy to caricature the situation by drawing a simplified distinction between wealthy incomers and poverty-stricken locals. This is not our intention in *Rural Learning*. What we want to do is to draw attention to the wide diversity of lifestyles and life-chances in rural areas of England, and to show how adult learning can be a way of empowering people faced by difficult material circumstances, whilst also being subject to the same pressures of rural life which create social deprivation and exclusion.

This section of the guide is not an attempt to sum up the condition of rural England. We supply some facts and figures and some useful information, and then try to get you thinking about how they relate to the conditions and circumstances in your area. In the process we highlight a number of issues which may provide the basis for some useful learning activities. Alternatively they may impinge on your working life because they affect the people you are working with.

The support and help of Sue Stoner at Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE) has been invaluable in putting this section together. ACRE is a national organisation which represents Rural Community Councils. For full details of ACRE, see Section Four, page 64.

Population

A significant number of people live in the English countryside. Using a definition of rural as settlements with a population under 10,000, the recently formed Countryside Agency gives a figure of 9.3 million, or 20 per cent of the population of England. Between the two most recent censuses (1971 and 1991) the rural 'slice' of the population has increased in size by about 20 per cent, at a time when the overall population has grown by about four per cent. This trend has continued since 1991.

New residents in rural areas face many of the same problems as those already faced by rural inhabitants, although 'incomers' tend to be richer and more middle class than many of those who have traditionally worked on the land and in rural industries. For many of the 'incomers' to rural communities, their new homes more than meet their expectations of a higher quality of life, access to open countryside, good neighbourliness and absence of crime. For

others, problems of rural isolation can soon spoil the idyll. The countryside in winter is a very different place to the countryside in summer. Dependence on a car to get to work, go shopping, and take children to school is essential. Many villages do not have pavements, which makes it unsafe to allow young children to roam freely. In many cases, access to the countryside is restricted to a few muddy footpaths. Often there are few cultural activities beyond the TV set.

The influx of new people can increase tension. Different groups often have different ideas about what life in the countryside is all about. Richer people push up the price of housing, often to a level beyond the means of those who have lived locally all their lives.

Questions to think about

- Can you identify any new groups of residents in your area?
- How might their expectations of life in the countryside differ from those of longer-term residents?

Housing

There is pressure to build a lot more houses in rural areas. Some of this may meet the needs of people working or growing up in rural England. Most of it is likely to meet the demands of people who want to live in rural areas, but continue to work in towns and cities. In 1996, Jo Lavis of the Rural Development Commission calculated that only 13,000 units of housing had been provided in rural areas to meet a need for 80,000 units.

Although there is every intention of building some new houses, there is disagreement and uncertainty as to whether this should be done by allowing 'natural' growth across all rural settlements, by concentrating growth in particular towns and villages, or even by creating completely new villages. The protests from those already living in the countryside (both born there and more recent arrivals) are added to the voices of those bemoaning the damage that will be done by these developments.

Protests are usually against the building of new homes, full stop, with people not in favour of building more affordable homes. Government regulations do not make it easy for local councils to provide affordable housing in rural areas, even where they want to do so. Roughly one in three rural council properties have been moved into the private sector under 'right-to-buy' legislation, while many of the remaining tenants are stuck in the poverty trap created by unemployment, low pay and housing benefit.

Example

*In the **Derbyshire Peak District**, where quarrying provides one of the few sources of unskilled manual labour, there are quarry workers who have to commute from industrial towns like Sheffield because they cannot compete with holiday-makers and commuters for housing.*

*In **Warwickshire** 'There is not time or space here to deal with the housing problem, but I can offer some key words and phrases: sale of council houses; absence of rented properties; weekend/holiday cottages; colonisation; gentrification; long-distance commuting; three cottages knocked into one Des Res; 'The Old' Bakery, Smithy, etc . . .' (Landscapes of Poverty: 129)*

In a 1994 survey of 12 rural areas carried out by Paul Cloke (Cloke *et al*, *Lifestyles in Rural England, 1994*), all but one reported that 60 per cent or more of those interviewed thought that 'local' people were experiencing difficulty in getting the accommodation they needed. Of course the problem is ongoing: the children of today's rural 'incomers' may in 20 years' time become the 'locals', in search of affordable housing to buy or to rent. One of the consequences of this is 'hidden homelessness' among young people who are unable, or unwilling, to live at home and who drift away to sleep rough in the city, or on the floors of friends' houses.

It would be misleading to pretend that nothing is being done: a number of schemes financed and supported by ACRE and the Countryside Agency, and by individual County Councils and voluntary organisations, have been brought to our attention.

Example ***Housing the young homeless***

A project instigated by Rye Council for Voluntary Service in East Sussex has provided a small hostel for homeless young people, run by Shaftesbury Homes. In addition to accommodation, there is some extra support. They are able to offer training to local people to become 'befrienders' or 'mentors' to the residents.

Equally, it would be misleading to pretend that the problems are being addressed with all the resources that are needed. Small-scale schemes tend to be effective but they are usually piecemeal.

Questions to think about

- What housing problems are you aware of in your local area?
- Who can you talk to about possible housing problems?
- What schemes are operating in your area to deal with problems of rural homelessness? Who is involved in them?
- In what ways might housing become a focus for learning in a rural area?

Work

Far fewer people work in the countryside than live there. In particular, few of the newcomers to rural areas actually work there. They choose to live in a rural area but commute to a nearby town or city to work, or they are the new-style 'teleworkers', working from home but electronically connected to distant workplaces or clients.

In rural areas most enterprises are small: in the most deprived areas, called Rural Development Areas (RDAs), over 90 per cent of firms employ fewer than 10 people. In fact, RDAs account for 35 per cent of the land of England and 6 per cent of the total population.

The new jobs in rural areas tend to be highly skilled, whether in computer-based home-working, or in the new, light, 'clean' workshops being set up in converted agricultural buildings. Thus the rural economy, like the rural communities they serve, is segmented. The main distinction is between those who are confined to a traditional rural economy of low-skilled, poorly paid, irregular work, and those who either commute into nearby towns and

cities to relatively well-paid, secure jobs, or are the elite of the new high-tech industries in rural areas.

Wages are generally low and the most rural counties are to be found at, or near, the bottom of league tables showing average earnings. The most peripheral rural counties have the lowest wage rates for both men and women. Cornwall, for example, has an average weekly wage £88 below the national average. (*Countryside Agency, 1999: 16*)

Rural poverty continues despite the new kinds of work being attracted to the countryside, which often requires skill levels that people do not have. Another recent study by McLaughlin (1990) argued that because rich and poor live so closely together, the existence of real poverty is masked in rural areas: 'As a generalisation, urban poverty tends to be concentrated in particular areas of towns: in rural areas the extremely rich and the extremely poor can be living side by side.' (*Rural Stress Information Network, 1998*)

Poverty is officially defined as income that is less than half of the national average earnings. There is now general agreement that up to a quarter of rural people live in poverty, but often people do not talk about it openly. With the exception of young people, there is a degree of resignation about the continuing existence of hardship in rural areas. (*Landscapes of Poverty: 34*)

Questions to think about

- Are there any obvious signs of wealth and poverty in the area you are working in?
- What kind of jobs are available locally? What skills do they require? How do the wage rates compare with the national average?
- Is there significant commuting? If so, to what towns and to what sort of jobs?
- How could adult learning help to 'bridge the gap' between skill levels of rural people and the skills required in the new job opportunities being created?

Agriculture

The occupation most closely identified with the countryside is farming, yet, at the last census (1991), Lincolnshire was the only county in England with more than 10 per cent of the working population employed in agriculture. Agricultural employment in most ostensibly rural areas is generally about 5 per cent, while the highest figures (15 per cent) are for the Leominster district of Herefordshire and South Holland in Lincolnshire.

Nonetheless, agriculture is big business, with large-scale farmers and the organisations that represent them, especially the National Farmers' Union (NFU), referring proudly to the 'agricultural industry'. In fact, just 3 per cent of farms occupy 27 per cent of farmland.

Farming is currently depicted as an industry in crisis. In the aftermath of World War Two, a public policy decision was made to make Britain as independent as possible of imported food. To this end, vast tracts of land were ploughed up to grow cereal crops. A system of subsidies was set in place, later taken over by the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which made agriculture very profitable indeed. Two things have

changed the picture in recent years: firstly the political decision to begin to unravel the regime of subsidies; secondly the scandal of BSE disease, the destruction of cattle herds, and the loss of livelihoods in the beef production sector of the agri-economy.

Like all industries, agriculture has modernised and mechanised. Less labour is employed but more skills are required of those working in agriculture and the land-related industries. One in seven of the agricultural workforce (60,000 people) lost their jobs between 1987 and 1997. Many have drifted into unemployment or into seasonal low-skill jobs. Low-paid workers are increasingly concentrated in jobs such as chicken battery farms and market-gardening, while other agricultural labourers, who have been displaced from the land, have moved into building, transport or quarrying, or seasonal work in tourism. Without the skills or mobility that would enable them to compete for skilled factory or office work, they are confined to an economy characterised by low skills, low wages, bouts of unemployment and few prospects.

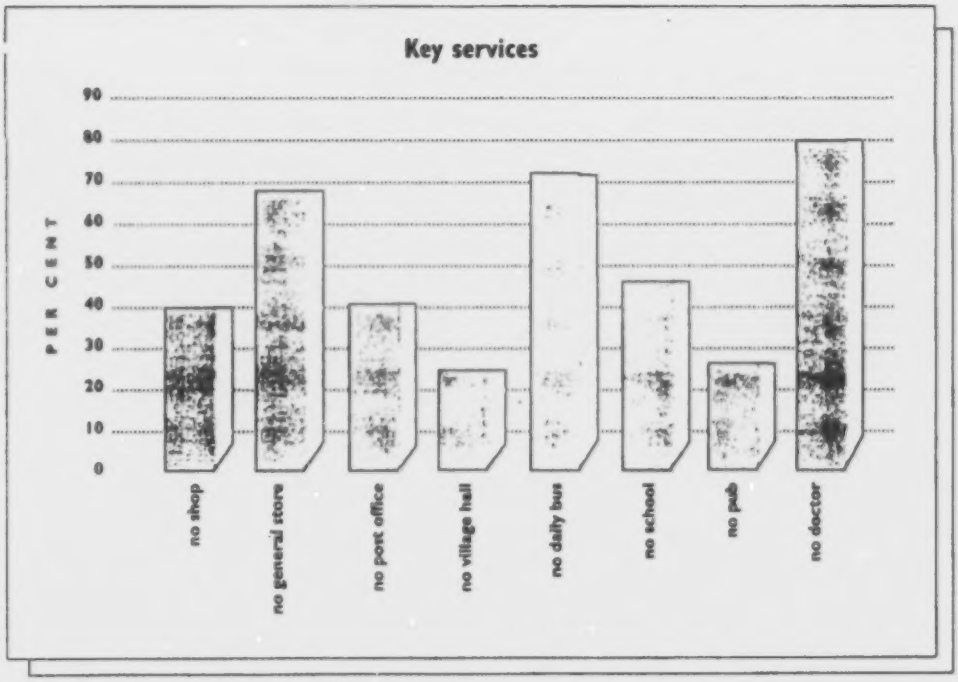
There are a few signs of revival, for example a renewed interest in organic farming, which is likely to benefit from changes in the CAP over the first decade of the new century and to be more labour-intensive than agri-business methods. Direct selling to consumers via 'farmers markets' in country towns is providing new methods of marketing, and the diversification being forced on farmers by a changing subsidies system may provide more jobs in related sectors.

Questions to think about

- Does the area you are working in still have a significant agricultural sector or not?
- What new job opportunities are available in your area?
- Are there new jobs being created in alternative uses of agricultural land (eg holiday cottages, golf courses, organic crops)? What skills are needed for these new jobs and where can people learn them?

Services

It is generally accepted that people in rural areas have less access to public and private services than their urban counterparts but, as with so many things, there are big differences between communities. The availability of key services is a problem in many rural areas. The general situation, as it was in 1997, is shown opposite:



These general figures hide the individual and varied experiences of different rural communities, however.

Example

- ***Small towns/large villages.*** *Rural communities between 3,000 and 10,000 are likely to have the majority of the above facilities. So only one per cent of parishes in this group had no shop and one per cent no school.*

- ***Medium-sized villages between 1,000 and 3,000.*** *Here the services available are likely to vary far more from one parish to another. For example, a village of this size might serve as a 'service centre' for a cluster of surrounding smaller villages and hamlets. A village with a large commuter population is less likely to have a range of facilities than a similar one where a higher proportion of people work locally.*

- ***Small villages under 1,000 population, hamlets, isolated farms and cottages.*** *Here the question of scale means few facilities are likely to be available in the village. Much may depend on the liveliness of the local community, for example its success in campaigning against the closure of the village school or in support of a village hall. However, 59 per cent of parishes of fewer than 1,000 had no shop and 67 per cent no school. Often imaginative solutions are thought up, such as the post office counter in the pub or village hall, the community-run shop, and so on. Even so, 92 per cent of the smallest parishes (under 100) have no shop at all.*

- *In addition, there are* ***variations between rural areas.*** *For example, in North Yorkshire, 60 per cent of parishes have no shop, while in Cornwall the figure is only 20 per cent.*

It is unclear whether things are getting better or worse. The level of provision of shops and post offices has remained stable over the period between 1991 and 1999, but the nature of those shops may well have changed. Banks, police stations and bus services seem to be disappearing from rural communities, while nurseries and day care for the elderly are on the increase. The round of village school closures and amalgamations of the 1980s seems to have slowed down or come to a halt.

Impact of declining services

The figures presented above mean different things to different people. The rural commuter family with two cars, and access to jobs, shops and recreational facilities in a nearby large town, are usually unaffected by the problems described. Poverty or ill health brings a very different perspective.

One in six rural households does not have access to a car. The household with no car is more likely to be directly affected by any reduction in facilities. Simple activities like food shopping, collecting a pension, going to see the doctor, getting children to a party or a friend's house, can become major chores. Use of a car is not the same as car ownership: if one household member uses the car for travel to work in a nearby town, other household members (usually a woman and children) cannot use it.

Much thought has gone into ensuring a future for the village shop. However, whereas the village shop is used for occasional purchases by commuter families who do their main food shopping more cheaply at a distant supermarket, it is often the main source of food shopping for poor people in the village.

Equally, there is no simple contrast between 'locals' and 'incomers'. People's circumstances change. Divorce can break up households which have been successful in material terms, which can leave one partner and children facing the tribulations of rural life alone. If the partner left behind is a woman, the chances are that her standard of living will deteriorate. Couples who are healthy, reasonably well off and who move to the countryside to improve their quality of life, can find 25 years on that children have grown up and left the area; that retirement increasingly isolates them within a restricted geographical location; and that deteriorating health makes them increasingly dependent on facilities that are sketchy or non-existent. The same can apply to rural households where a child is born with a learning difficulty or a disability.

So far as elderly people and people with disabilities are concerned:

Older people

91% of rural parishes have no day care for older people
81% have no residential care for older people
61% have no recreational clubs for older people

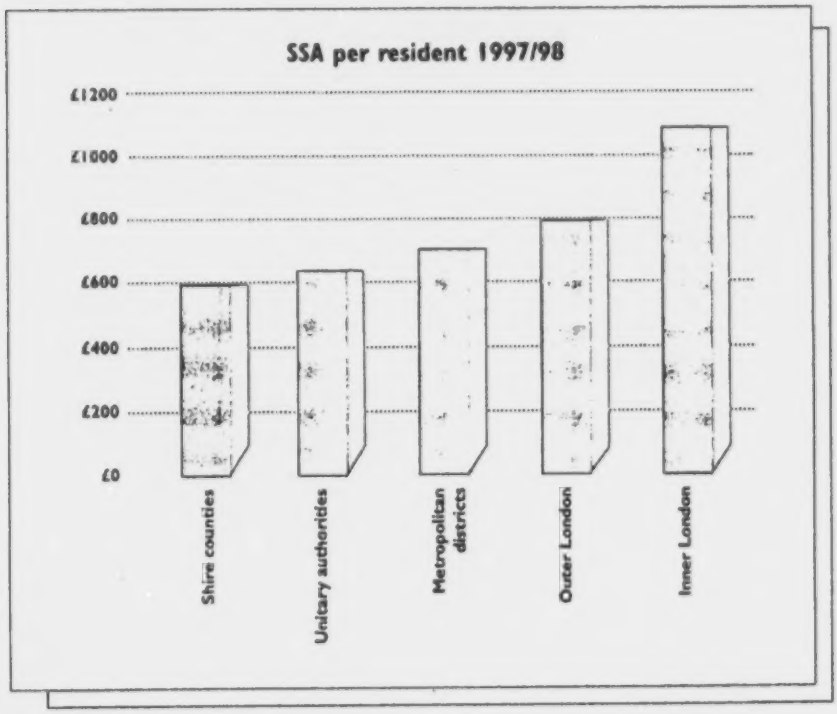
People with disabilities

96% of rural parishes have no day care for people with disabilities
91% have no residential care for people with learning difficulties or physical disabilities

(*The State of the Countryside, 1999*: 27)

For anyone who is either without a job, is poor, has a disability or long-term illness, life in a rural area can become like a lottery. Overall, whatever the problems of life in urban areas may be, there is higher expenditure on social services than in rural areas. Pressure is growing on the government to change the way in which the 'sparsity factor', or the additional costs of services in thinly populated areas, is calculated.

The chart below shows how much money went from the government to local authorities of different kinds in 1997–98 to support local services. This is called the **Standard Spending Assessment** or **SSA**.



Because central government uses the SSA to calculate its funding for each authority, and because spending in excess of SSAs has been subject to controls in recent years, people in shire counties can expect to receive fewer local authority services. For example, in shire counties there is less homecare and residential care for the elderly, less adult education, fewer sports and leisure centres, and concessionary travel schemes are less generous. (*The State of the Countryside, 1999: 28*)

There are, of course, specific projects designed to halt or reverse the disappearance of services in rural areas. Transport is a good example: from 1998 more money has been put into rural bus services, consideration is being given to the use of subsidised taxis for isolated rural dwellers, while the ACRE Jump Start project in Gloucestershire provides moped use in rural areas to encourage take-up of employment and training. However, like housing initiatives, these tend to be local and small scale.

Questions to think about

- What services are plentiful or absent in your area?
- What differences exist between villages?
- What are the major contrasts, as far as services are concerned, between rural and urban areas locally?
- What sorts of people are missing out because of declining services in your area?
- Are there any specific campaigns or initiatives up and running to counteract decline?
- Is there evidence of voluntary effort to 'fill the gaps' where local government services are in decline?

Rural communities

The word 'community' is a dangerous one. It has lots of positive associations about people caring and sharing, but it can also imply exclusiveness, informed by the attitudes of people who want to preserve their village in a heritage time-warp. Ideas about community often ignore, or fail to recognise, the significance of differences between people, in ways that can be damaging to those who are in most need of support. There are particular problems, for example, for people who are housebound or who have disabilities. Yet all adult learning workers need to understand the different and complex ways in which ideas about community can affect their work.

Romantic ideas about the strength and supportiveness of village communities are among the factors that attract people to life in the countryside. But village communities differ: some are split and divided, some united. There are also historic rivalries between villages. Most rural communities have their own particular characters and, even within communities, you should expect to find a number of different groups with different interests. Factors such as social class, ethnicity, gender and age all have an influence on people's sense of community and identity. In some communities there may be lots of integration and social mixing between different groups. In others, the same individuals and the same groups appear to control everything. Even in the most integrated of communities, some people may still feel like outsiders. Asked whether she felt that a course she was doing through work was of any value to her local community, an employee of a small engineering firm in Dorset replied: 'Oh, I don't belong to that!', as if 'community' was a club, like any other, that might exist in the village.

In well-integrated rural communities, a good cross-section of village types: rich and poor; incomers and locals; commuters and local workers; employed and unemployed; older people and younger people are able to get together around common interests and concerns. In less integrated and more divided communities it's often the case that the same people tend to dominate in all matters and they silence debate. What matters is not to impose pre-conceived ideas of your own about community in the area you are working in, but to spend a lot of time familiarising yourself with the particular and complex patterns of social interaction you see in action.

Black and minority ethnic groups are under-represented in rural populations. When black people live in the countryside they are unlikely to have extensive local support networks. Racism and the racist activities of extremist groups are an issue in rural areas, but so is the kind of alleged 'colour blindness' which denies the experience of black people. One particular ethnic group that rural education workers may well meet is travellers. Their lifestyle is part of the rural landscape but they often suffer severely from the prejudices of their neighbours. Conservatism and isolationism are a part of the fabric of traditional rural communities and these are usually not the kind of values that welcome minority ethnic immigration. In a racist society individual prejudices are fed by competition for scarce resources, especially in relation to jobs, housing and public services.

In Section Four of this guide, we have included more information about rural racism, as well as two specific organisations that can offer specialist advice about travellers.

Questions to think about

- What are the special characteristics of different rural communities in your area?
- What differences do you detect between people living in these communities? How might this impact on your work?

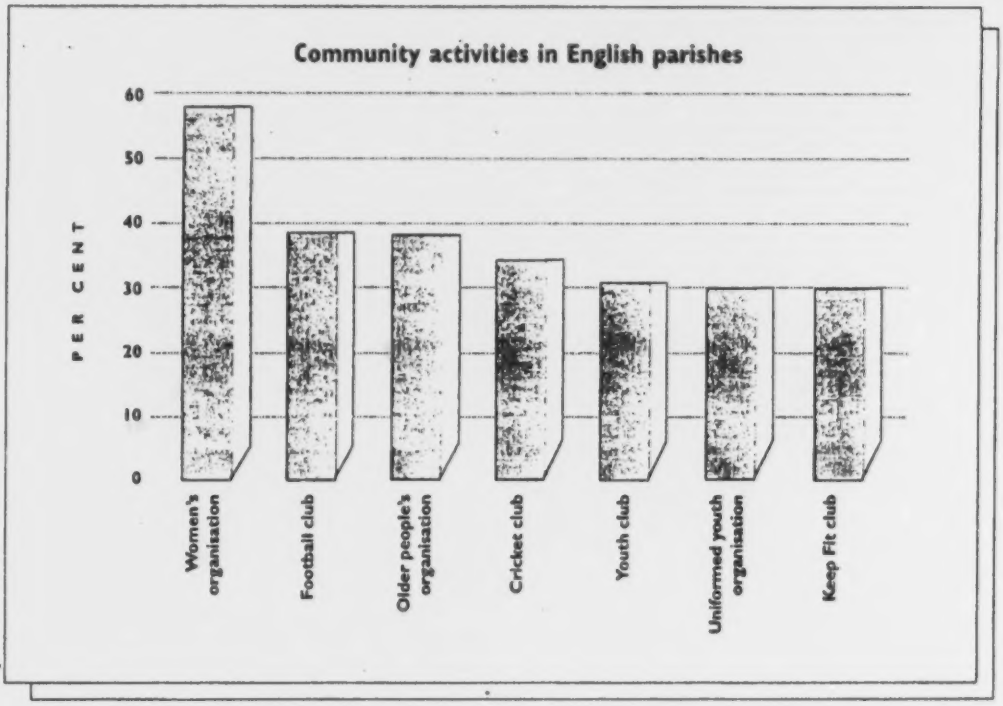
Organisations, clubs and societies

Another way of approaching the question of community is to look at the 'organised community' i.e. the range of specific activities which draw people together, in ways that go beyond being good neighbours, or passing the time of day at the bus-stop, school-gate or village shop. A thriving community might be expected to have lots going on, whereas a village where clubs and societies do not exist, or are struggling to recruit, may need some intervention to re-establish a feeling of community. The problems experienced by clubs and societies, such as how to attract and keep members, are not so different to the problems of adult learning workers trying to set up activities in less populous corners of their patch.

The table overleaf shows activities enjoyed by more than 30 per cent of parishes, but there are plenty of others, often concentrated around sport and recreation.

One of the focal points for clubs and social activities is the village hall. Village halls have been on the increase in recent years, with a two per cent increase in the number of parishes enjoying this facility between 1991 and 1997. ACRE's village hall project, 21st Century Halls for England, funded by the Millennium Commission, attracted 1,000 enquiries, of which 367 went on to submit full applications. The process of getting a village hall built or upgraded is a good example of community development: bringing together interested people, debating village needs, engaging in fund-raising to fill the gap between what is available in grants and what is required to foot the bill. In addition to new buildings, many communities might be considering extensions, often incorporating new functions into the traditional village

(*The State of the Countryside, 1999: 36*)



meeting place. Examples of successful projects which help to take halls and their communities into the twenty-first century include: extra meeting rooms for use as doctors' surgeries or for IT training; improvements to accessibility and toilet facilities for people with disabilities; and significantly better energy efficiency. (*ACRE 1997–98*)

The danger of only working with organisations that are already established in rural communities is that it is easy to miss out on those people who are non-joiners; those who are too shy or too individualistic to want to join in. It also ignores the material constraints that stop people joining in activities: lack of money, lack of transport for those living in out-of-the-way spots, disability. It may not take into account some cultural constraints, ranging from a feeling that a particular activity is 'not for the likes of us', to a feeling that trying out an activity may produce another experience of failure to add to an existing feeling of low confidence and self-esteem.

Research studies about participation in clubs and societies have consistently shown that non-joiners are also those who do not participate in organised learning activities. So from the point of view of extending and widening participation in country-based adult learning, and countering social exclusion, it is necessary to make contact with people beyond the circle of organised activities.

Questions to think about

- Which villages have which clubs or activities in your area? (You may find it useful to lay this information out in table form to put on your notice-board.)
- Are there activities for both rich and poor, young and old, women as well as men?
- Which communities have a village hall and what sort of facilities are available in each?
- How can you make contact with non-joiners and find out about their concerns and interests?

Newsletters and community magazines

Tendencies leading to isolationism and the absence of integration in communities can be tackled, to some extent, by developing a lively and broad-based village newsletter. Equally, a badly produced newsletter can serve to emphasise the exclusive nature of some village activities and other people's sense of 'not belonging'. In many villages, newsletters are delivered to households, or are available at the village shop or pub, so they reach a wider variety of people than are included in any group activities going on. Putting newsletters and community magazines together can, in itself, provide numerous and varied opportunities for learning that is both pleasurable, creative and informative, and which encourages people to become more actively involved in community life.

The example below shows how an educational organisation used the parish newsletter as a first focus for its activities.

Example

Boscastle WEA

The WEA branch at Boscastle, Cornwall was part of a small project in the early 1990s between the Cornwall Rural Community Council and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) to revive and diversify the rural work of the WEA. We are now at the heart of a web of organisations and activities which attract a wide range of people in a small village containing agricultural, commuter, retirement and artistic sub-groups. The community newspaper, The Boscastle Blowhole, *is now over six years old and has been so successful that it runs at a profit. This means that branch funds can sometimes be used to support financially those people for whom money could be a barrier to participation in courses. We have worked hard to get funding to upgrade the parish hall to a full village hall, which now has its own independent committee, but offers a venue for the various WEA activities and other village activities too. Two particular projects have widened participation beyond a 'traditional' WEA audience. Firstly, the wide range of activities around the 1995 VE Day anniversary celebrations and, secondly, a history project which involves both 'locals' and 'incomers', which is on-going. Our branch believes that local activities must be arranged by local people to suit local interests.*

Questions to think about

- Do any of the villages on your patch have newsletters?
- If so, who organises them?
- Who gets copies of the newsletters?
- How could they be improved?

The changing countryside

It is not our intention to repeat well-known arguments, or facts and figures, about the threat of human activities to the ecology of the planet. Rather, we want to summarise some of the specific arguments about how the changes and risks impact on rural areas, and to begin to suggest some of the learning implications which may follow.

Farmers may or may not be especially sensitive to natural beauty, the subtleties of a winter sunset, a spring hedgerow rich with wild flowers and bird-song, summer haze across a field of ripening corn and the autumn splendours of woodland. What is certain is that their primary concern has to be about the countryside as a place to earn a living for themselves, their families and the staff they employ. The same goes for quarry-owners and a number of other land-based industries. Like many of the traditional inhabitants of rural areas, they see the land in terms of people and their basic needs of work, housing and transport.

At the same time, environmental concerns impact on everyone, as BSE and its devastating effects on English cattle-raising demonstrates. Neither farmers nor farm-labourers are unaware of the way the appearance of much of the countryside has changed since the Second World War, and not always for the better. Farmers are frequently involved with state-financed environmental schemes, such as payments for hedgerow or dry-stone wall retention, or schemes to reclaim and re-use land at the end of quarrying and open-cast mining activities. This is especially important in designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or National Parks. Individual farmers may take a special interest in the environment, by going organic in response to consumer demands, or by developing activity centres where urban dwellers can better understand the life of the countryside.

Other people who live in rural areas may have a predominantly conservation attitude to their local area. For them, farmers are often viewed with dislike as the despoilers of the traditional rural scene. But all too often, such people oppose all developments, whether they are environmentally sound or not. Thus, plans to build affordable housing in 'picture-postcard' villages, or to create jobs by converting ex-agricultural premises for light industry or by erecting workshops for small craft and high-tech industries, are also opposed without thought to their advantages in making rural communities more lively, socially mixed places in which to live.

A third group with an interest in the countryside, whose interests are often overlooked, are the people who live in towns. They frequently see the countryside as a place of recreation, whether in the organised form of country parks, golf courses and so on, or for walking and picnicking. This might mean wanting to extend the footpath network and the 'right to roam', where this does not conflict with agricultural use, such as growing crops. They may

also have specific interests, such as industrial archaeology, where many of the best examples are now in rural areas, or natural science, in particular, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

Some or all of these views are likely to be picked up when research into 'what is needed in rural communities' is carried out. They often arise during village appraisals. It is calculated that since 1979, 1,200 parish appraisals have been carried out, involving up to 15,000 local people, and obtaining feedback from around three quarters of a million local people. While these have not usually been set up as 'adult learning', there is no doubt that they have become an important form of learning, both for the individuals involved in conducting the appraisals and as a way for the village as a whole to learn about itself as a social unit.

This can only happen if there is a genuine involvement of all interests. There are notorious examples of village appraisals which have been conducted by small village cliques, without involving the full spectrum of village people in the design and conduct of the appraisal.

More information about village appraisals can be found in Section Three of the guide, including an example emphasising how a village appraisal can be used in the context of developing learning opportunities.

Questions to think about

- Do you have any information about contested views on changes taking place in your area?
- Are there areas of conflict? If so, what are they?
- How can you carry out your work in a way that takes account of conflict, rather than simply ignoring it?

Change – global, national and local – and its effects

Change is the one constant of the modern world, but it happens at a number of levels, most of which are beyond individual control. The buzzword increasingly used to describe some of these changes is 'globalisation'. In reality, change is a series of processes, some of which produce increased emphasis on the global, while others produce increased emphasis on the local.

Capitalism is organised at a global level, dominated by the USA, working through international bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). To illustrate the impact of these forces, consider the fate of a small engineering firm in a small town in a rural area. Their main customer, a branch of a multinational in a nearby city, decides to move its production to another country, where wages are lower or skill levels higher. The net result is that the small-town engineering firm loses its main customer and goes out of business. In turn, this produces change and uncertainty for employees who have to find alternative kinds of work, or travel further to work, or retrain for different jobs.

One of the main aims of the European Union is to make economic change more palatable through a number of schemes designed to encourage

economic and community development in areas subject to change. These may be very broad areas, such as the Objective 5b areas, which cover parts of Devon, East Anglia and Lincolnshire, the Welsh borders, Derbyshire and the North of England. Cornwall has recently 'achieved' Objective 1 status because its economy is considered to be so far behind that of most of Western Europe. Other rural areas may benefit from special funds to redevelop old coalfield or steel areas. Coal mines were often located in rural areas and, since the closure of numerous mines over the past 20 years or so, many former coal communities now have more in common with deprived rural areas than with urban areas.

National governments can still influence what happens in their own countries. During the recessions of the 1980s and 1990s it became commonplace in Britain to say there was nothing that could be done – 'market forces' must be allowed to operate, whatever the human cost. However, a casual look around Europe shows that this is not the case. Not all European countries experienced such high rates of unemployment and such a major increase in the gap between rich and poor, as we did in Britain. Education and training is a good example of how national governments can 'make a difference' by encouraging inward investment and local business start-ups, through investment in skills. Most local authorities now have Economic Development Units which contribute towards the liveliness of local communities. However, local control can also have a negative effect, for example when a local council, more concerned with heritage than jobs, refuses planning permission for a non-polluting workshop development in a village or small town.

Change is not necessarily a 'good thing' in a simple way. Many of the changes that have been forced onto the English countryside have not been good, for example the environmental costs of intensive agriculture. The changes in the organisation of the coal and steel industries could have been handled in a way that was less devastating on local communities facing the impact of closures and redundancies. The unplanned growth of 'out-of-town' shopping centres has had a detrimental effect on shopping facilities in both rural towns and villages, to the particular disadvantage of people without a car. At the same time, living in the modern world has meant advantages in terms of improvements in the general health, education and housing of the population, and people's ability to share in a national and global culture, as well as the culture of their particular locality. What is of concern here is that change has been more positive for some people than others. It is important to look at who are the winners and losers when it comes to change and the extent to which people are empowered, or can learn, to understand and become more in control of what happens to them as far as possible.

The example below shows how change outside the control of an individual can affect their life and work

Example ***An ordinary working life***

Barry left school and went into farming but was made redundant when EU milk quotas were cut. A spell in office work, including responsibility for photocopying, led him into printing, via an offer from an uncle with a small firm to 'take him on'. Eventually he received training in a larger firm, but is now facing the reality of technical change in the industry. As part of an Individual Learning Accounts pilot scheme involving a TEC, the print

union GPMU and a number of small printing firms, Barry has been learning the secrets of desktop publishing. The guidance part of this project has confirmed for him that computerisation is the way forward and the guidance officer suggested that a general IT course (CLAIT) might complement the digital print courses. Yet there is still the barrier of shift work to overcome. He said: 'If I didn't have a mortgage, I'd give up my job like that and do a full-time course', but he does have a mortgage, and the future looks full of uncertainty.

As Barry's story shows, learning is an integral part of this new environment of change and risk. If the firm does not take on new technology, it runs the risk of going out of business. If individual employees do not take part in retraining, they will probably end up being made redundant. In this particular case, small firms were unable to afford the time off which allows employees to take part in conventional day-release or evening classes, while shift work makes it difficult to attend conventional evening classes. In this case, it was the willingness of a local college to put on a course over a series of Saturdays and Sundays that enabled the whole thing to happen.

Overall, we believe that lifelong learning is an important way in which people can deal positively with change and risk. This is a term which embraces all the many kinds of learning which adults require to fit them for a changing labour market, and to enhance their own confidence and self-esteem. Taking control entails not just 'What I know and do now' but also 'What I can learn and what I can become in the future'.

Questions to think about

- What kinds of changes have taken place in your patch? Have their origins been local, national, international or global?
- How have they affected people's lives?
- How are people facing up to the challenge of change?
- In what ways could adult learning help people deal with change?

Building up your own local picture

By now you will have thought a lot about the context of country learning in the area in which you work and will have begun to get to grips with some of the issues and dilemmas you may have to face. Please keep in mind three questions which will be important in your work:

- What tensions and conflicts exist in the area?
- What problems do you anticipate in your work?
- Who are likely to be your greatest allies in your work?

To refresh your memory, make sure you can supply answers to the questions outlined in the following check-list and keep these notes for future reference.

Check-list

Question		Examples
What is your area like?	☐	Population characteristics, agriculture, industry, houses, community buildings, meeting places, etc.
What is available already to shape needs and support learning activities?	☐	Jobs, homes, social facilities, schools and other learning provisions, voluntary organisations, clubs, local newsletter, etc.
What is missing?	☐	Jobs, facilities, transport, etc. Talk to people – what do they complain about?
What have people seen changing around them in recent years?	☐	Movement in the local population, how people live, shop and travel; environment, etc.
Who are the major employers?	☐	How have they changed in recent years? Look and ask!
What proportion of men and women are dependent on low-paid, part-time jobs?	☐	Familiarise yourself with what jobs are on offer in the nearest Job Centre, local paper, adverts in shop windows.
To what extent is skilled and seasonal work available locally, for example in tourism or agriculture?	☐	Make contact with local employers – what skills and skill shortages are evident in the local economy?
Has there been any growth in 'new' jobs, for example, self-employment, IT?	☐	Consult the Local District or County Council's Economic Development Unit. TECs and Business Link are also a good source of labour market information.
What are the main characteristics, trends and movements in population?	☐	Contact local estate agents. District and County Councils should be able to tell you in broad terms about population change. To get the details, talk to people in the street or in shops about what their perceptions are.
What are the implications of these changes for your work?	☐	To put it another way, what are the learning needs likely to be and how can they be met? It might be worth having a stab at this now, and then repeating it after you've worked through Section Two, which should give you some more ideas about your future work.
Who makes use of the countryside in your area?	☐	Different types of agriculture, leisure, specialist interest groups.

SECTION TWO

Developing rural learning

Introduction

Now it is time to consider, in more detail, some of the implications for adult learning of the characteristics and changes in rural England, outlined in Section One. In many ways, the priorities for adult learning are not so very different from those in urban areas, but there are specific barriers to participation to be overcome in rural areas. We shall also refer to what constitutes best practice in the organisation of learning opportunities in rural areas.

As far as possible, we have included initiatives which have stood the test of time, rather than the latest bright idea, which may or may not become tomorrow's accepted wisdom! It is very important to experiment and try out new ways of working, but not all initiatives will be successful. The fact that an initiative works well in one area does not mean it will necessarily work in another.

It might be helpful to refer back from time to time to the notes you made about your own area at the end of Section One. Think about the approaches we suggested:

- Are they relevant to your area?
- What additional difficulties or possibilities do you need to take account of?
- What might you have to change?
- Are there obvious reasons why certain ways of working will *not* prove successful in your area?

You and your context

In this section we have drawn on our own work and experience as adult learning organisers and researchers, but also on the wide range of contacts which NIACE enjoys. In developing the overall approach, and in choosing case-studies and examples, we have been helped by David Browning, an adult learning consultant working in Northumberland, Susan McGrath, a consultant working in East Sussex, and Sue Stoner of Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), which is based in Gloucestershire.

In Section Two we include a series of **review questions**, designed to help you relate the guide to your own situation as a worker and to build up a picture that relates to your own local area.

It may be that you are an adult education worker who has already had some experience of teaching and organising learning opportunities in more urbanised areas. You may also have had experience of outreach work with community groups in urban areas. Now that you are involved in

developing learning opportunities in a more rural area, you will obviously discover a range of different kinds of barriers and opportunities. To be an effective adult learning worker in a rural area you need knowledge of rural society and economy, as well as adult learning knowledge. If you are a project worker, you will feel under pressure to 'get results' quickly, which can sometimes be at odds with the community development approach of building up contacts and relationships of trust with people before launching them towards new horizons!

It may be that you have a background in nursing, healthcare, social services or community development and have now been asked to take on responsibility for adult learning. Probably you are already familiar with many of the issues about rural poverty and the tensions in rural communities which we outlined in Section One. Yet the task of creating learning opportunities may seem very daunting. A key decision when working with a group of people who, in a previous professional capacity you have become used to calling 'clients' or even 'patients', rather than 'learners', is when to make explicit reference to learning. At what point do you ask people about moving on from rather informal learning activities to more formal structures?

Whatever your own previous professional role, you will be able to bring skills and experience to the job, something that you feel relatively secure about. Equally, you will have things to learn. We hope that what follows will help with some of the things you may still need to learn. You will also learn a lot from those with whom you network on a day-to-day basis in your area.

Review questions

You and your context	*Relevant questions*
The job	What are the aspects of the job you feel most confident about? What are the aspects that are still rather daunting?
Skills	What are the most useful skills you already possess for this job? What are your most pressing training needs?

You and adult learning

From an Inter-City train at 125 mph, or from a car window at 60 mph, the countryside is a blur in which only the middle distance, a landscape devoid of people, is truly in focus. This guide is intended to slow the pace down so that you can see the rural areas of England in personal terms. What are the constraints and opportunities that make up rural life? How do people learn the new skills and knowledge they need in their daily lives? How can our efforts as adult learning workers be used to better effect to support relevant and useful adult learning? We are conscious, throughout, of a tension between two contrasting views of adult learning.

Formal learning assumes that learning is cumulative and linear, where each stage builds on an existing base of skills and knowledge.

It generally operates within formal institutions, such as colleges, universities, adult education centres, workplace training centres. The credits awarded for successful learning eventually accumulate into qualifications that are of particular use in the job market or which identify particular people as knowledgeable or 'educated'. The most obvious drawback to formal learning is that access and participation are limited by constraints on public expenditure, by practical difficulties such as travel, time and paying fees, and by the negative attitudes towards formal education that so many adults carry forward from their schooldays.

Informal learning assumes that we learn all through life: that most of the things we learn, we learn from our family, friends and workmates; from books and television programmes; from our own quiet reflection or emotional turmoils – rather than from schools, colleges, teachers and all the paraphernalia of formal education. However, two thoughts are worth bearing in mind. One is that all informal learning can benefit from a helping hand , for example by asking the advice of the local librarian about choosing a book, or finding a particular piece of information; seeking advice at work from a more senior colleague or 'mentor'; following up a phone number or address for further information at the end of a TV programme. Secondly, informal learning, based on personal interests or community involvement, can often act as the springboard to more formal learning.

It is probably most useful to think about formal and informal learning as extremes on a continuum rather than different things. Parents, for example, 'learn' how to be good parents by imitating (or not, as the case may be!) their own parents – with help and support from other family members, neighbours and friends. But beyond this are numerous radio and television programmes related to parenting, as well as the activities of organisations such as the Pre-school Learning Alliance, whose members provide early years education and care, as well as adult education. The schools their children attend may well be involved in Family Education projects, which help parents to support their children's learning and also help parents to become more involved in lifelong learning generally. In a similar way, people learn from the roles they take on in rural life, for example as school governors or parish councillors, but they may be helped in these roles by doing more formal courses, on a face-to-face or distance learning basis.

Even the best LEA adult or community education activities can still be threatening to some people. Informal learning is increasingly seen as the first and crucial step for people who may eventually access formal institutions. The most important aspects of this work are likely to be:

- a strong social atmosphere in the group which encourages mutual support and encouragement;
- emphasis on what people know and can do, rather than what they don't know and can't do;
- a tutor who can identify with the experience of learners who have had little to do with education since leaving school;
- the availability of informal advice and guidance to support learners as they grow in confidence and motivation;
- learning activities which stem from existing interests, and what is

important and relevant to people's daily lives, rather than something imposed from outside.

What do people want to learn about?

You may well be looking to develop adult learning which is both useful and relevant to rural people. Yet people have a wide variety of reasons for learning.

Learning related to work

By this we mean the broad general skills that people need to keep up to date with changing conditions at work. Information technology and modern languages are good examples. For some people in less skilled jobs, and under threat of redundancy, this may include basic skills – such as numeracy and literacy. There may also be specific courses relevant to those who are either self-employed or running small businesses; book-keeping or employment law are good examples. Women returning to education constitute a sizeable group, who may want to brush up on their general education skills and build confidence before taking up employment, or moving on to a more formal course in a college.

Examples

Yorkshire WEA: Training on wheels

Since 1993, the Yorkshire region of the WEA has used European Union funding for coalfield regeneration to provide a mobile project which takes IT and foreign language courses out to rural locations – in this case old pit villages hit by the run-down of the coal industry. Most of the people who come on our courses are women, although the courses are open to both men and women. Childcare costs are covered, and the courses are a springboard to further education or training, or back into employment. The courses are free and run for 14 hours per week for 10 weeks. Apart from IT and Spanish, the courses offer the chance to build self-confidence, practise interview techniques, prepare a CV and find out about other opportunities. We provide accreditation through the Open College Network.

A curriculum for the modern countryside

Easton College used to be the Norfolk County Agricultural College but now describes itself as 'Norfolk's college of the countryside'. The subject range now includes agriculture, animal care, bee-keeping, business studies, countryside management, creative skills (floristry and interior design), equestrian courses, horticulture and rural engineering. This kind of range is now typical. Kingston Maurward College in Dorset is now a regional centre for IT courses. In Northumberland, the old agricultural college now describes itself as a 'land-based college'.

Learning related to leisure and quality of life

The traditional adult education crafts curriculum remains important because it enables learning to take place in relaxed social surroundings. It helps to build friendships and a sense of community. Sometimes this social purpose is overt, for example a village map which has been painted or embroidered, or an oral history project. These classes can also enhance the quality of life of older and retired people. For some younger people with negative previous experience of education and training, such activities can serve as a relaxed

access point to learning, and a way of building confidence and motivation, as a first step towards more formal courses.

Example ***Essex Sound Archive***

Since 1982 the Essex Sound Archive (ESA) has built up a collection of 2,000 tape recordings covering virtually every aspect of life in the county. For a specific project called 'Continuity and Change in the Essex Countryside', we collected the memories of people living through change in rural Essex, including farm workers and land owners, but also newcomers such as commuters and weekend cottage owners. The ESA has run workshops for 80 people interested in collecting memories within their own communities, including advice on what sorts of questions to ask and how to use the equipment. The participants can then borrow the equipment to conduct their own interviews. Steve Hussey, director of ESA, writes of the 'feelings of enthusiasm and pride held by people in relation to their lives and communities'. This gives the work a value above and beyond the value of the historical data produced.

Learning and community development

Some forms of adult learning tackle community development more directly. This may take the form of training courses for members of voluntary organisations, including committee training for parish hall committees, or for elected parish councillors. Sometimes the learning may be directed at a specific practical end, such as a community newsletter or a campaign to save a village post office.

Example ***Sussex Rural Community Council***

Many Rural Community Councils (RCCs) run Community Development courses. Here in Sussex, we have a very extensive training programme for the voluntary sector. Key partners in the work are Lewes Tertiary College, Sussex Enterprise (the Training and Enterprise Council [TEC]) and the Councils for Voluntary Service. The RCC and the Sussex Associations of Local Councils were instrumental in setting up the open learning Local Policy courses at Cheltenham and Gloucester College. Both County Councils offer bursaries for this course, which is specifically aimed at parish clerks and councillors, as well as other people interested in this type of work. Learning is supported through residential schools, post and telephone contact and local meetings. During 1997/98 alone, 800 people used our Spring into Volunteering and Skills for Volunteers programmes. These provide basic skills, such as how to be a good listener, first aid and committee skills for club members and volunteers. The RSA Advanced Diploma in the Organisation of Community Groups offers accredited training to a wide range of voluntary sector organisations in the county. An increasing number of organisations ask the RCC to arrange specific training for staff and volunteers which fits their particular objectives.

Review questions

You and adult learning	*Relevant questions*
Formal and informal learning and your own experience of education and training	Which aspects of your own learning would you describe as 'formal' and 'informal'? Under what circumstances have you learned successfully, and when and why have you struggled with learning?
Motivation for learning	What are the main reasons people in you rpatch have for learning?
Learning on the patch	What learning activities are already happening in your area under the headings of work, quality of life and community development? What other activities might be useful or relevant?

Getting involved

Adult learning workers come in different shapes and sizes: some may live in the areas where they work, while others may 'drop in' from outside; some may be involved politically as parish, district or county councillors, while others may have no particular interest in organised politics; some may be involved in campaigns and issues which affect people on their patch, while others may not be. We want to consider these three possibilities and how they might relate to your work.

Where you live

It is not always a help to live in the same area in which you work. You may become known as the parent of an unruly child, owner of a bad-tempered dog, holder of late-night parties, the man to avoid in the rugby scrum or the woman who always walks away with the wine-making prizes at the village show! Equally, of course, your presence on the patch can reassure people that you are the kind of person they can trust. At the same time, you must beware of the kinds of local rivalries we mentioned in Section One. It is important that you are seen as an 'honest broker' with no particular axe to grind, who does not favour one village over another.

Local politics

This is a difficult one. You have as much right as anyone to be active in local politics and to stand for elected office. Equally, you have to draw a strict line between your own political views and your work. This can be easier than it sounds.

Parish councils are seldom as openly 'party political' as other councils and there are often shared concerns. At the same time, as a person keen to see social justice prevail and conscious of the divides in the local community, you

will also be conscious of the interests of minority groups in the community. In many more favoured villages, this can mean sticking up for the interests of the unemployed, local people who feel alienated by wealthier, more articulate incomers, and travellers. It is important, in a village, to be on good terms with parish councillors, who may be crucial people when it comes to finding a place to hold a learning activity or trying to get a bus timetable changed, so that people can get to an activity in a neighbouring village (and back from it!). Also, of course, they will have training needs of their own which you may be able to help meet. Equally, it is important to find ways of 'hearing' the voices which are often drowned out by the parish council 'consensus'. We hope you will not have the experience of one Rural Community Council worker who was told at a parish council meeting: 'go home and breed!' because 'it's women like you who go out to work and create all sorts of social problems in rural areas!'.

At District Council and County Council level, elected councillors have more power and can be expected to have a 'wider' picture. They know that there are often difficult decisions to be made about allocating scarce resources between rural communities. They will also have paid officers to advise them on competing needs. But they will have their favourite priorities and projects, without a doubt. Let us suppose, for a moment, that you are working with a group who want to upgrade a village hall. You may already have organised training days for them on how to present statistical (and other) information about the village in order to demonstrate need, or to hone their committee skills to make them more efficient. You may have plans for a range of informal learning activities at the new hall in response to suggestions made by people in the village. However, you may not want to get too involved with the local district councillor if you know that the real decision is being made by a committee chair from a different party. Instead, some discreet lobbying with the latter may well be more successful than sharing a platform with your local champion!

Campaigns and issues

Campaigns and issues are difficult. On the one hand you want to show yourself as someone who 'gets stuck in' and cares about the same issues as people on your patch. At the same time, precisely because something is an 'issue' means that people will probably be divided about it. Favour one group (even if it's what you believe in) and you alienate the other.

Example ***A village divided against itself***

You are aware of a local group of people who support organic farming methods, and are very concerned about the use of genetically modified crops (GMCs) in agriculture. They ask for your help in organising an evening at which the dangers can be explained to people. At the same time, other farmers and farm-workers in the area are dependent on 'agribusiness' methods, while still others think GMCs are only of concern to a small group of 'nutters' who've recently moved into the village. What to do? You can withdraw completely, or you can continue to support your local group, which is, after all, what you believe in yourself. But either way you risk alienating half the village, who may have all sorts of other learning needs which you could help them with. A much more sensible way is surely to persuade the group of the advantages of a broader platform at the meeting, with

at least one person putting the case in favour of GMCs, and another explaining that you can be against GMCs because of their, as yet unknown, side-effects, while supporting agribusiness methods, about which the side-effects are known.

This kind of response may not work in all cases, but it has a good pedigree. It is the tried and tested method which has frequently been adopted to ensure that village appraisals are representative – involving the whole village in deciding what questions are going to be asked, using local people to take questionnaires round and help people to fill them in, and emphasising that jobs and schools are as important as an attractive environment. It is also important to work alongside local people. The good rural learning worker will always work with the grain of village life rather than against it.

Example

Going with the grain

Susan McGrath tells the following story about a needs analysis which she conducted for a Community College in East Sussex: 'By chance I noticed a community one-stop shop in a vacant property in one of the target villages. By dropping in, I not only got a very good contact list, but found that a village appraisal was about to be undertaken with the help of local churches and the Sussex Rural Community Council. By becoming involved in this process, I could enable the college to obtain very useful information, because they included some additional questions about ideas for learning in the village and where it could be located.'

Review questions

Getting Involved	*Relevant questions*
You and your involvement	How are you involved at the moment with this rural area, its people, politics and organisations? Who do you need to contact in order to find out more?
Campaigns and issues	What campaigns are already running in your patch? Who is involved with them? What are the issues?

Partnerships and providers

The concept of partnership is based on the simple idea that, just as individual people can often achieve more by working together in a team than working individually, so organisations and institutions can achieve more through co-operation than through competition. In practice, we know it is not that easy. Unfortunately, people are just as likely to try to 'use' other people and agencies for their own purposes, as they are to behave in a helpful and co-operative way. At least if you know what you want from partnerships, you will be better able to judge which of these is happening.

In some cases, the projects you are involved with may have been designed by a number of agencies, or it will be clear from your job

description that you are expected to work with a number of named agencies. In either case, it is likely that there will be some kind of steering group that represents the various partners in your project. There may be other agencies in the area who are not involved to the same extent, but who may be able to help you with aspects of your work.

Whether or not you are involved in a formal partnership, you will certainly meet up with people along the way who have common interests and enthusiasms, and are trying to reach goals that you think are similar to your own. These 'informal partners' may be employees of an agency, but equally they may be officers or members of voluntary organisations, or simply enthusiastic individuals within a rural community.

If you are involved in building up working partnerships this check-list will be useful – especially if you are moving to a new area of work:

- Decide which agencies/organisations are relevant.
- Make personal contact by phone and find out who is the most relevant person to talk to.
- Send information about your project by post or e-mail.
- Ask your potential partner(s) to do the same.
- Fix up a meeting to discuss possibilities.
- Write to your new partner(s) outlining what you think has been agreed.
- Evaluate on a regular basis the value of the partnership to your project.

Making personal contact is important, especially if the organisation is a large one. Not everyone in an organisation knows what everyone else is doing. Your letter may never reach the desk of the person for whom it is most relevant. It is important for any potential partner(s) to have written information about your project, so spending time at the beginning producing a neat prospectus about your project will save time later. If you are working as part of a larger organisation yourself, it is a neat way of letting your colleagues know what you are up to. People often come away from meetings with quite different ideas about what has been agreed, so it is useful to check this out in writing before you start working together. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of partnership(s) is always important: is the co-operation really of value to your target group? It is easy to confuse 'liking someone' with partnership: you can still go to the pub or to the gym with someone, even if you have agreed that working together is not producing much benefit.

What do partnerships have to offer?

Formal education and training providers such as colleges can provide:

- premises
- tutors
- access to funding for courses.

The same goes for local authority adult education services.

In some cases, colleges and adult education services may have outreach projects which overlap with your area and interests. For example,

projects concerned with childcare or transport may help if you want to bring people together and make provision for pre-school children or school-age children in school holiday times.

Social Service or Health Service professionals such as social workers, GPs and health visitors may have similar concerns to your own, and may or may not be involved in informal adult learning with rural people.

Employers are sometimes concerned about contributing to the personal development of their employees, as well to the specific training their workers need for the job in hand. Trade unions are widely involved in the education and training of their members, and can be a useful partner for some projects.

Your best partners will often be found in those voluntary organisations concerned about local issues or about promoting the interests of particular groups in the rural communities. Two of these – the Women's Institute (WI) and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) – have specific adult learning briefs.

Strategic partnerships

Learning partnerships have become part of the accepted wisdom of adult learning, at least on paper. Gone are the days when different institutions were encouraged to compete with each other for students and resources, and to obtain as big a share of the 'learning market' as possible. But in some places, old habits die hard and you may well find that your work with other learning professionals is complicated by rivalries and tensions, which contribute little to the success of adult learners in rural areas. On the other hand, you will probably find a great deal of willingness on the part of voluntary organisations to work together. Here the main issue is often how to achieve a relationship of equals between a formal, statutory organisation with set ways of working and paid staff, and a voluntary organisation with few, if any, paid staff and very flexible ways of operating. Learning partnerships are important to government thinking, however, as this example shows:

Learning partnership

Partnership and collaboration are essential to achieving the Government's goals for economic prosperity and social cohesion through regeneration, capacity-building and community development. Learning Partnerships will add real value by developing more coherent learning provision to meet the needs of young people and adults and the skill requirements of employers. They will support action to widen participation, increase attainment, raise standards and meet the skills challenge by driving action to achieve local targets linked to the new National Learning Targets, developing a framework for new student support arrangements in further education, forging links to the social inclusion agenda in schools, and initiating work in basic skills.
(DfEE, Lifelong Learning Partnerships remit, January 1999:1)

Developing partnership skills

Partnerships do not always work, particularly when different partners have different objectives and when power relations come between partners. The latter is especially likely to happen when partnerships include statutory and voluntary agencies. The enhanced power that derives from having a well-

paid job and access to funding can make it very difficult to establish an equal relationship with a voluntary agency, dependent on voluntary effort and with no independent funding. It takes considerable personal skills, and commitment, to make partnerships work under these circumstances.

Members of small voluntary organisations are likely to have a clear idea about the problems they want to solve, in other words, what their objectives are. However, they are unlikely to have experience of typical 'professional' ways of proceeding, such as conducting surveys, completing funding applications or running pilot schemes. It is a matter of making these skills and techniques available to local communities, while at the same time identifying with the reasonable objectives of local people.

If you are successful, and become known as a good 'partnership person' – the sort of person who will make things happen and help others to make them happen – then people will beat a track to your door and the process will become self-sustaining. If, on the other hand, you behave in an insensitive or over-bearing way, you may find your phone does not ring so often.

Examples of partnerships

Most of the examples which follow are taken from the 1997/98 ACRE Report. To complete this report, each Rural Community Council (RCC) was asked to nominate one event or project it was especially pleased with.

Points to note:

- the careful definition of the purpose of each partnership
- the range of partners involved, both statutory and voluntary
- the advantages of 'going with the grain' of government policy
- the links between adult learning and economic and community development
- the importance of sustaining projects into the future.

Maximising benefit take up

We set up a partnership of voluntary and statutory organisations, convened by Derbyshire Community Council, to develop this project, which has joint Rural Development Area and Derbyshire County Council funding. The projects addresses the causes of low take-up of benefits in rural areas. It aims to increase and improve local information relating to entitlements, and to establish village or topic-based networks to sustain awareness. Increased income is not only important to individuals and families, but also feeds into the local economy.

IT for all

It is impossible to select a highlight of the year for the Community Council of Hereford and Worcester. However, one satisfying event was the establishment of Basic IT courses in 13 Community Resource Centres across both counties. The Centres provided computer and reprographic facilities for use by voluntary groups, and hosted courses run by trainers from the local colleges, using laptop computers. Funding came from the County Council, District Councils, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Colleges of Technology, the Community Council and CountryWork (an ACRE funding stream). Participants included voluntary sector

workers, young mothers, unemployed people and those starting their own business. As a result of their training, all became more confident computer users and some used their new skills to secure paid employment.

'Sorted'

Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council worked in partnership with the Council for Drugs Problems to produce a CD using young people's words and ideas concerning the effects of drug use. Our CD features two tracks: 'Sorted' written by Nigel Atkin of the CDP and Withernsea Youth Club; and 'Gonna Beat it Down' written by Nigel Atkin and Roger Newton. Both songs highlight the effects of drug use upon the individual and community. The CD was supported by the 'Tackling Drugs Together' initiative and the East Riding of Yorkshire Council. Art work for the CD was designed by Driffield School.

Rural Enterprise

Sussex Rural Community Council aims, in its rural enterprise work, to promote local economies and find ways of removing obstacles in the path of people currently excluded from economic activity. Rural enterprise, funded by local authorities and the Countryside Agency, is part of its core work. During 1997/98 extra projects were carried out with funding from the European Union, the Countryside Agency, the District Councils of Sussex, Sussex Enterprise and the National Lottery Charities Board. For example, an East Sussex Local Produce Consortium was set up and managed. This group has representatives from all local authorities, Sussex Enterprise, and the National Farmers Union. It has developed a programme of initiatives and projects for the next two to three years.

Review questions

Partnerships and providers	*Relevant questions*
Formal partners	Which partners are involved in your work or are named in your job description?
Informal partners	Have you identified individuals or voluntary groups on the patch that you think you might be able to work with? Who are they?
'Natural' partners	Which are the partners you expect to work with on a regular basis?
Less obvious partners	Which organisations or agencies might you work with for specific purposes?
The purposes of partnership	Who is supposed to benefit from the partnership? How will you know whether this has happened?
Activities	What will you do together?
Contributions	What will your partners contribute? What will you contribute?

Networking

Networking involves making connections between what you do and what other people do. Networking and partnership have many things in common. In some ways, partnerships are the form of work that derives from networking and, in turn, partnerships set up further opportunities for networking. But networking can also spread beyond your immediate area to other parts of the country and abroad, especially other parts of Europe. You may well be able to get ideas about new ways of working from the experience of people in other places. Networking can be an enjoyable activity in its own right and it is sometimes possible to lose sight of its end-purpose, which is to offer a better, more inclusive service to the people you aim to serve. Here we shall consider how best you can keep in touch with what is going on in your area and in your profession, including the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

Meetings

Ask almost anyone in a professional job what they like least about it, and they will probably say 'meetings'. Many people find themselves attending several meetings every week, in which only part of the agenda is of direct interest to them or is in any way likely to benefit the people living in their patch. How has this situation arisen? While there are perfectly good reasons for having general meetings, for example to give people a chance to air their views on subjects under discussion or to encourage staff members to identify as part of a team, there is also an element of habit. The team meets because it has always met, and a whole morning or afternoon can be wasted in this way.

If you are organising meetings, it is important to be quite sure what their purpose is and that the people who have been invited are all really necessary. If you find yourself being invited to other people's meetings that don't accord with these simple principles, then you probably shouldn't be attending! If meetings are being used to pass on information, then it may be much more effective to designate a member of the team to produce a well-designed newsletter for distribution. These issues are especially important in rural areas where a lot of time can be wasted travelling to and from meetings.

When attending meetings it is important to make a careful note of:

- what has been decided
- what action is required
- who has been delegated to take action and by when.

Where people come to meetings as representatives of organisations, they should be encouraged to report back on decisions taken.

Why networking?

Networking often provides an alternative to meetings. It suggests information and ideas flowing within and between organisations in many different directions, horizontally as well as vertically. As a way of working, however, it begs two questions which are especially pertinent in rural areas.

First, the balance of 'professional' and 'voluntary' people with whom we network: are we spending too much time sitting in people's offices rather than chatting in the village shop or at the school gate? Keeping a detailed

diary for a couple of weeks, and perhaps discussing this with a sympathetic colleague or friend, can be a good indication of whether you have got the balance about right.

Second, how do we network with people whom we do not meet in the daily course of business? Do we spend time flashing round the countryside by car, using up the time we have saved by cancelling meetings? Clearly this is possible, but it is not desirable! The telephone is part of the answer, but equally clearly ICT is a way of working effectively across sparsely populated rural areas, as well as keeping in touch with what others are doing in other areas nationally and internationally.

Working together using ICT networks

Many organisations are developing collaborative approaches to working based around networks. Collaborative systems allow a widely scattered group of individuals, sometimes on different continents, to work together on a joint project. The group can see and hear each other, using video conferencing, and send files of work to each other, using e-mail.

Collaborative systems allow developments to take place which are not too expensive, which are not long-winded and when deadlines are too short for a more conventional approach. A small group of tutors, based in rural areas throughout England, or even throughout Europe, trying to develop courses for adults, could find a single face-to-face meeting costly, in circumstances in which several meetings are required. By using a collaborative networking system, however, it becomes far easier to achieve the objective. There is no need to spend time and money simply to take part in a meeting. Participants can work from their desks. Information can be shared, commented on and tested quickly and efficiently. Collaborative working is expanding rapidly and provides a new approach to working together.

ICT in action

ICT is a crucial means of learning for people in rural areas, giving them access to jobs, but also access to electronic networks within which they can develop their own interests and concerns. In addition, it is an important means of communication for networking with people who share similar concerns and overcoming the barriers of distance and isolation.

These ideas come together in what is often referred to as the telecottage (telecentres, teleworking centres, electronic village halls are related terms and ideas). A centre like Moorlands Telecottage, the example featured here, provides access to ICT equipment for business, educational and community use. It has grown from a community education setting, primarily concerned with providing access to learning for rural people, and with providing opportunities for people to use ICT equipment for business and community purposes. The second example is of a project in the Nottinghamshire coalfields, which brings ICT facilities and skills to an area badly affected by the closure of coal-mines. The new concerns are about how to make sure that ICT contributes to social inclusion by drawing in people with fewer skills and less education, and people who do not have the money to have ICT equipment at home.

Moorlands Telecottage

The Moorlands Telecottage is located at Manifold Primary School in the village of Warslow, in the Staffordshire Moorlands. Britain's first telecottage was developed as part of the Manifold Villages Community Education Project. It is open during the school day and most evenings. It supports community development by providing free access to computers, and reduced charges for photocopying and fax services. It supports economic development by supplying a range of training and business support services. Training opportunities in ICT enable people to use the Telecottage to improve their employment prospects, for community purposes and for teleworking as part of a small business. When the Telecottage started up in 1989, ICT meant mainly word-processing and desktop publishing, but the range has now been extended to include e-mail and the Internet. Community Education in the area is supported by a Community Education Council representing local, statutory and voluntary organisations, as well as schools and parish councils. At least 75 per cent of the members are local people.

Nottinghamshire Virtual Village

The Nottinghamshire coalfield is a good example of how problems, associated with the run-down of a traditional industry, are exacerbated by specific rural problems, such as inadequate public transport and a lack of training and employment opportunities. The 'Virtual Village', of which there were 11 by 1999, is an exercise in community self-help, supported by the Rural Community Council, a college and a TEC. Computers have been installed in a number of rural locations, where they can then be used to access advice and information on the Internet, for video-conferencing and as a focus for village ICT training needs. It depends on using trained volunteers (4–6 in each village) who teach other residents how to use the Virtual Village computer. Villages have also been enabled to create their own village web-sites. The Virtual Village is a way of developing and sharing skills in rural communities and contributing to the capacity of rural communities to deal with change.

E-mail and the Internet

Electronic mail (e-mail) is a simple method of allowing computer users to talk to one another by sending information down a telephone line. There is a variety of ways of paying for this, the most common being a monthly fee to a 'server' company which organises the onward transmission of messages and data. It is increasingly possible to access free e-mail and Internet services, supplied by commercial firms hoping to stimulate advertising and commerce on-line. Systems like this charge phone calls at the local rate and can be very good value. They are quick, cheap and not pretty! In addition, relatively large computer files (eg reports, articles) can be attached to these e-mails, providing the people at either end agree on which computer programs they are using! Pictures can also be sent. The main drawbacks are that not everyone has a computer at home or the skills to use the equipment.

While some people emphasise their fears about computers and electronic control over their everyday lives, we prefer to emphasise the democratic potential of ICT. If we want it to work that way, there is much more chance that it will do so. It means, for example, that a draft report can be circulated very widely for comments before it takes printed form. By grouping together a number of people's e-mail addresses, you can produce discussion groups that can rapidly send their ideas on a topic of local interest

to everyone else on the list. This includes tutorial groups in supported open learning. This is also very useful when a group of colleagues work in scattered rural communities. The most successful discussion groups have a clear focus and one person who acts as 'moderator' to help the discussion along.

The example below shows how a village centre can make equipment available to local people and show them how to use it.

Robertsbridge Community Internet Centre

The Community College at Robertsbridge in Sussex opened a Community Internet Centre in 1999 at its recently refurbished Youth Centre in the main village street, following local consultations about ICT access. The centre also runs courses ranging from Computers for the Terrified to specific business applications. Courses for the over-60s about using the Internet are popular, and complement existing work between the college and Age Concern. The Rural Community Council is offering free training at the centre to local people who volunteer to work with people who drop into the centre and need help with ICT skills.

The Internet is a more complex and potentially much more powerful affair. It can seem a very strange concept to older people, but it is part of the world of younger people who have grown up with it. In England in 1999 only 1 in 6 households already have access to the Internet although the number is increasing year by year. There are dangers. The use of the Internet for spreading pornography is an especially well-known one, as is its use by extremist political and religious groups. However, our job is surely to make the more virtuous aspects of the Internet as widely available as possible. Already, courses are available on-line via the Internet and, in the future, many more will be. The University for Industry (Ufl) will greatly expand the range of courses available about employment and skills training, and will also provide funding for the development of learning centres where people can gain access to ICT facilities.

If you are helping to develop the use of ICT, you need to bear in mind:

- The need for basic training courses in how to make the most of e-mail and the Internet.
- The issue of training in ICT skills in rural areas is closely linked to the availability of ICT training facilities. Successful schemes have included the loan of PCs to village halls and other rural centres. Laptop computers are now small enough to load into the boot of a tutor's car. A number of 'mobile' projects use buses, converted to provide IT training facilities, which can be parked at any convenient location.
- The need to ensure access to ICT facilities for those who do not have access to them at home or work. Various approaches are possible, but all have to balance the need for technical sophistication with the need to provide facilities as close to people as possible. Village halls, telecottages and village primary schools are the first places that come to mind, but this network may eventually include much more unlikely settings, such as a farm office, a pub or a post office, as well as opportunities provided within mobile libraries. Ninety-two per cent of English parishes have

either a permanent or a mobile library. It will not be long before they come equipped with access to ICT facilities in rural areas.

- The need to ensure that support is available to rural learners using ICT. This is an important concern of UfI, but also to anyone who is trying to expand learning opportunities in rural areas.

Review questions

Meetings and networking	*Relevant questions*
Meetings	Are you clear about the purpose of all the meetings you go to? How can you make sure that any meetings you call are a sensible use of people's time? In what other ways can you keep in touch with people?
Networks	Who are the main people that you network with? Are there other people you should be in regular contact with? (eg parish clerks, churches, social workers, health visitors, playgroup leaders, school-teachers, librarians, village clubs and societies)
ICT	What do you know about the availability of ICT facilities in your area? Which agencies are providing ICT training in the area?
E-mail and Internet	What are your own training needs in this field? How can you help to meet the training needs of people in the area? How can you help to improve people's access to ICT equipment and training?

Development and progression

There are four main stages in developing learning opportunities for people in your area:

- Getting people involved and making learning available.
- Making sure people have basic skills which are useful in themselve, but are also a key to unlock other learning.
- Organising accreditation (if required).
- Helping people to move on.

Learning is a linear activity, especially at school. Younger learners move from one level to another. It is easy to slip off the 'learning ladder': failure, you might say, is built into the system of initial education and training. The situation in lifelong adult learning is much more complex. Progress is achieved by a process which is closer to a climbing frame, so that people can advance to higher levels, but also move between different types of learning, which reflect their different roles and interests in life. Some people may have quite negative feelings about anything that smacks of 'formal' education and training, so it is important to re-introduce them to the idea of learning as an enjoyable activity. All of this is complicated in rural areas by the task of getting sufficient people together who are interested in the same kinds of learning.

Getting people involved and making learning available

In Section Three, we shall concentrate on the nuts-and-bolts of making learning available – places to meet, money, childcare and so on. In this section, we want to establish some clear principles and give a number of examples of what can be done. We hope you will find these inspiring rather than daunting. Bringing people into learning situations is a tricky business.

The first principle is 'one step at a time'– people need the opportunity to learn something they are interested in, in an encouraging and supportive atmosphere, in a place not too far away from their daily lives. The second is that people want to learn things of interest and importance to them in their daily lives; therefore, they should set the learning agenda.

Rural learning can help people and communities to grow in four key ways:

Individual development

Adult learning enables rural people to develop new skills and interests, which enable them to take part in a wider range of activities and to access a wider range of jobs. In addition, it enables them to become more expert at a chosen activity or to make progress at work. This example, from County Durham, suggests how one thing can soon lead to another and that a good idea will soon be copied. The example from Sussex suggests, in turn, just how far learning can take people.

Toy libraries and clubs for children in Durham

Sacriston, in County Durham, is an ex-pit village with a high level of unemployment and social problems. The original idea was to raise money to buy toys for children, but this changed into the idea of providing a toy library. A charity was set up and the first two toy

libraries opened in 1997 and 1998. Given the number of one-parent families in the village without relatives nearby, a further idea was to provide childcare facilities. This led to the setting up of a 'Kids Club', the Sacriston Fun Club, based on the local school, which would enable single parents to work longer hours and would provide additional care during school holidays. Further Fun Clubs have been established in neighbouring villages, so that by 1999 five clubs existed. Phil Henmans, who had the original toy library idea, is now the Operations Director of the charity, and other jobs have been created in childcare and for volunteers, with training provided.

Women Returners – ten years on

Three women who took their first tentative steps back into work and study as part of a women returners course, run in the Rural Development Area in East Sussex, are now, themselves, helping to make learning happen for people in the area. Gina Sanderson is the Council for Voluntary Service co-ordinator in Rye. Georgina Standen runs the Rye Adult Education Centre, teaches on a women returners course run by Hastings College, and is studying for a Counselling diploma. Finally, Jayne Ayres went into adult education teaching IT and is now the outreach guidance worker for Hastings College.

Work

Adult learning within employment can contribute to the overall profitability of an enterprise, and to its ability to weather the storms of technical change and economic downturns. This applies as much to the few larger employers in rural areas as it does to self-employed people and to micro-enterprises, which employ individuals or family groups. The two examples here show how learning can help the survival of two important rural occupations – hill-farming in Yorkshire and village shops in Surrey – which are both under pressure.

Yorkshire WEA work with the Hill Farming Initiative

In North Yorkshire, the new WEA course offers an introduction to computing and its applications to farm record-keeping, funded through a Further Education Funding Council widening participation project. The Hill Farming Initiative is a group of hill farmers who have set themselves up as a pressure group for a sector of the farming industry which is experiencing difficulties at the present time. In one year 50 farmers (30 men and 20 women, aged 25–70) have taken part in three areas of the North Yorkshire dales and moors. They are 30-hour courses which can be followed up by further 30-hour courses for consolidation and progression. At the time of writing (spring 1999), 47 farmers were taking part in these follow-up courses. Locations include village halls and church rooms. Ruth Patchett, hill farmer and WEA Branch Secretary at Masham, writes: 'Village halls in these areas have been alive with laptops and farmers rushing into classes at unusual times of the day, folders under their arms. Perhaps a strange sight in these hard-pressed times, but keeping records accurately and efficiently is essential for securing government and EU support payments, and for avoiding punishing fines.'

Build a better village shop

Surrey Voluntary Services Council has formed a partnership with the Surrey Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and the Surrey Association of Village Shops to develop a distance learning package. The learning pack will include information on shopkeeping, business management, economics, hygiene and relevant legislation. Surrey is regarded as a pilot scheme, with the possibility of making this available nationwide.

Organisations

In the voluntary sector, adult learning can contribute to the overall effectiveness of a local, rural organisation, whether it exists independently or as part of a national organisation or network, or in partnership with other local statutory and voluntary organisations. People learn from their work in voluntary organisations and by taking on important roles in rural communities, such as secretary of a housing association or village hall committee, or as a parish councillor or school governor. Equally, they will have specific training needs because of new roles in the community. We have given an example of this below, from the Fosseway Housing Association in Gloucestershire.

Fosseway Housing Association: tenant participation training

Fosseway Housing is the major provider of social housing in the Cotswold District of Gloucestershire. They encourage tenant participation in management through training. Courses are run by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service; they are free and transport is provided. Training is shared with North Wiltshire Housing Association. The courses cover topics such as running effective meetings, fund-raising, negotiating with the landlord, producing newsletters and involving people, public speaking and dealing with problems, such as noisy neighbours.

Communities

Adult learning can contribute to the liveliness of local communities as places to live, as in the example given here of the village map project in Shropshire. The project involves a group of scattered hamlets called Hope, in the Shropshire border country. The use made of individual residents' existing skills is particularly important. Activities like this contribute to the breadth of cultural interest and reference. As individuals and organisations develop and flourish, it is likely that the overall quality of life in the community will also be enhanced – as a place to live, work, become involved with other people, and participate in democratic self-management. Sharing and developing skills is an important aspect of this, as illustrated by the Isle of Wight LETS scheme described below.

Hope village map, Shropshire

Initially, drawing on experience in a larger village nearby, the residents took advantage of a planned school reunion in Hope to launch the idea. They saw the embroidered village map as a way of celebrating both the present and the past of the village. The work was done at communal sewing sessions and through work packs which people could work on in their own homes. Key skills were brought to the project by a local artist, a local needlewoman and the village postman, who was also a keen photographer. Spin-offs from the village map included an exhibition of photos linked to stories about the village and the collection of archive material about the area. The map was seen as an important step in building confidence among local people, culminating in the completion of a new village hall in 1995. A quilting project and a free embroidery project, based on the natural and human environment of Hope, have provided ways of developing skills and creativity. The project used no outside funding or professional help.

Isle of Wight LETS

A Local Exchange Trading Scheme (LETS) brings people together to share skills, goods and services, using a local 'currency' rather than cash. The services exchanged can include office skills, letter writing, building and plumbing, painting and decorating, car maintenance,

arts and crafts, and health advice. The Isle of Wight LETS scheme has a management group who produce a directory of what is on offer. The group learned how to organise a LETS scheme by having a speaker from LETS UK and then working through an information pack together. One distinctive feature of the Isle of Wight LETS scheme is that it includes tuition in languages, IT, music, cooking, etc, for members who either could not afford a college course, or who are uncertain about returning to learning and want to 'test the water'. The scheme enables people to do what they are best at and enjoy, while letting other people do tasks they dislike. It builds friendship and community, and confronts poverty by allowing people to use 'real' cash in a more effective way. The scheme was set up using a small grant from the ACRE Countrywork scheme, but is now self-financing with over 100 members. One member commented: 'The response we have received so far shows that already LETS is providing a positive encouragement to the local Isle of Wight community and economy. It is bringing people from all walks of life and different backgrounds together to share their skills and life experiences.' The local currency is known as 'islets'!

Basic skills

Some skills are regarded, quite rightly, as the foundation of later learning. Being able to read and write, a basic knowledge of maths and knowing how to use a computer are important 'basic skills'. However, there are all sorts of reasons why people have not acquired these skills to the level which they feel they need for their home and working lives. These reasons include:

- **Generational factors.** Many adults over 60 had their education disrupted by the Second World War. Children at secondary school in the 60s and 70s often complain that their education suffered because of the move from selective to comprehensive education. Older adults in rural areas suffered from the often poor conditions in rural primary schools in the first half of the century, when it was only too easy for the slower learner to be left behind. The village school in Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie* may be overstating the case, but it gives a real flavour of the old rural primary, with its single classroom, harsh discipline and primitive toilets.
- **Illness and disability.** Many adults have lost time at school because of an illness or accident, or because they were needed at home in the case of the illness of a parent or sibling. Given the cumulative nature of school education, it was often difficult to catch up on returning to school. Facilities for children with disabilities in rural schools were usually absent and it was often assumed that physical disability automatically meant learning difficulty too. In addition, specific learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, have only recently been recognised.
- **Gender.** In general, the present generation of young women do better at school than young men. But for many years, the reverse was the case. There is considerable evidence that teachers expected less of female students and dampened their aspirations with talk of marriage and housekeeping. Often the curriculum was different for girls and boys, even in the mixed schools which predominated in rural areas. Within the schoolgirl sub-culture, being good at maths and science, in particular, was seen as 'unfeminine' and to be avoided!

- **The special case of ICT.** Most adults over about 30 who know about computers have had to acquire these skills since leaving school. Even for younger adults, the programs in use on a daily basis at school, and the facility with which today's school-students take to e-mail and the Internet, have to be seen to be believed. There is a massive job of induction and updating to be done with the adult population. As we have seen, this has specific consequences for adult learning – both what people want to learn and how they learn it – as well as specific rural dimensions.

The two examples below describe how basic skills work can be organised in dispersed rural populations. There is a focus on IT skills, but opportunities to brush up on other basic skills as well. The first example concerns villages in rural South-East Somerset, with poor access to training and jobs. Free childcare and technical support are points to note here.

Lap-top computers in Somerset

Somerset Community Education is part of a Single Regeneration Bid (SRB) project called Work in Rural Communities. An economic audit in 1996 revealed a lack of both training and transport in the large rural area of South-East Somerset. The largest settlement is Wincanton (population 4,500) and the community education service is based at the Community School there. We were able to get some money from the Community Education Development Centre project 'Schools as Community Regenerators' to set up classes in village halls in the area using laptop computers. The project targets unemployed people and women at home. We provide free childcare and get technical support from an IT technician, who is responsible for moving the machines around from site to site. Courses include desktop publishing, volunteer training, work experience and a course aimed at women returners. The project is now seeking funding from local industry to support a further extension of the provision.

The second example is from the ex-coal-mining district of North East Derbyshire, where pit villages are now isolated rural communities with few facilities and high unemployment. The low cost, the provision of childcare, and the fact that the project comes into the villages rather than expecting people to travel out, are key factors you need to consider in thinking about this project.

The North East Derbyshire Mobile Project

This has been in operation since 1993, with two converted buses providing advice, information and learning at various locations around the ex-pit villages. Barry Northedge, director of this Derbyshire County Council Community Education project since it began, writes: 'Fieldwork carried out on the patch of the prospective new groups is crucial – go to the students, where they meet, listen and, wherever possible, arrive at joint solutions. Then act: set up the initial gentle, non-threatening session to develop contacts and confidence.' Advice and information work includes not only education and training but also welfare rights. Educational work covers a wide range of courses, including basic skills (Word and Number Power), IT courses, volunteer youth work training, confidence-building and job-search skills. Seventy-five per cent of students complete Open College Network accreditation. Barry Northedge gives nine reasons for the specific success of the mobile project:

- *Our users find the bus a safe, comfortable place.*
- *The bus can go anywhere: if we can park a bus, we can run a course!*
- *If interest wanes in one place, or the job is done, it is easy to move on to the next venue.*
- *The novelty appeals to people.*
- *We are in touch with local people and local concerns, ideally placed to recognise and respond to new needs.*
- *We are flexible in the range of courses we offer.*
- *We can pick students up en route to our destination.*
- *We are much cheaper than a fixed centre.*
- *We are in demand – the best reference there is!*

Accreditation

Why does accreditation matter? Because so much that is learned in a rural context is by informal learning, accreditation may be seen as too formal and even inappropriate. But, at the same time, it is usually those who have received least from the education and training system in the past who are most in favour of accreditation. While obtaining a GCSE or RSA or Open College qualification may mean very little to a university graduate, it can mean a great deal to someone whose only experience of education has been one of failure. We forget this basic point at our peril.

Open College Network. One of the most exciting developments of recent years has been the wide range of courses developed at a local level, in response to the interests and aspirations of local people, which receive accreditation from local branches of the Open College Network (OCN). The Open College Network provides an approach to accreditation which is user-friendly and learner-centred. OCN accreditation was founded in 1981 with the slogan *Credit where it's due*, setting out to provide recognition for the hidden learning in people's lives that is not necessarily formally organised and is often related to the development activities of small groups or communities.

Eventually, local OCNs will develop into a national system, which enables the credit gained in informal community learning to be used towards formal learning in colleges and universities. Equally, learners will be able to mix-and-match face-to-face and distance learning, and will be able to use credit gained in one place for qualifications in another, if they move house.

Most OCNs operate a range of forums in specialist areas. Some have rural forums where ideas can be shared and where specialist advice is available. This approach makes it ideal for small groups operating in rural, isolated or remote settings. Development workers from the local OCN will visit and work with you on training and education programmes, help to prepare submissions for accrediting courses, support you in the recognition process, and then provide external peer moderation to ensure quality and parity of provision.

The example overleaf, from Northumberland, gives some idea of the scope of the Open College Network.

OCN accreditation in rural Northumberland

Open College Network Northumberland & the Borders (OCNN) established a 14-member partnership of learning organisations in North and West Northumberland. This includes two local authority training departments (Alnwick and Berwick), two FE colleges, one of which is a land-based college, six school-based rural community education centres, the National Trust, Northumberland Guidance Company and North Northumberland Voluntary Action. In the areas in which we operate, five per cent of the county population (15,000) live on 95 per cent of the land area, so it is a very dispersed population indeed.

We hold regular workshops in partners' premises round this very large county. These have shared, systematically, the work in progress and this builds up the confidence of tutors, trainers and organisers, to develop new learning activities or to enhance existing learning by the addition of OCN recognition. Two half-time development workers divide the county between them and spend most of their time out of the office, working directly with community groups and centres. The results in the first year have been encouraging. Here are just a few examples of our developments:

- *Mountain Rescue Team training across all the skills, duties and responsibilities for these volunteers workers – Rothbury*
- *Women's Aid Volunteer Group Training – Hexham*
- *Youth Centre training provision in baby-sitting – Berwick*
- *Basic computer skills in Telecottages, Computer Clubs, coastal and hill villages, including an FE College mobile unit – Wooler, Seahouses, Belford and Berwick*
- *Community Group consortium, formed to develop shared training of volunteers throughout the Tyne valleys – Tynedale Voluntary Action*
- *Heritage programme, developed by FE College, enabling study of regional country topics, including local history, current issues, tourism and traditional music – Ashington.*

Progression: helping people to move on

'Progression' refers to the ways in which people move within, and between, more formal education and training agencies, including the vital – and often difficult – transition between informal and formal learning. This may also involve learning based at a nearby town rather than in the rural community and can raise specific issues about the barriers to participation in rural areas, such as cost, childcare and transport. Adult learners need two things above all. Firstly, they need ladders – to enable them to progress within a particular chosen subject and to achieve qualifications. These may be for their own satisfaction, but can also be useful for work, both paid and voluntary. Secondly, they need bridges – which enable them to cross from one kind of learning to another as their life develops, and from one provider of learning to another.

In this context, the following are important:

- basic skills – without which it may be difficult to take on other forms of learning
- the crucial role of locally based, informal activities in building confidence and motivation through supported learning

- ladders to advance within the levels of a subject
- the support needed in moving from one form of learning to another, for example from informal learning in a voluntary organisation to formal learning in a college
- bridges to move from one type of learning activity to another, reflecting the different roles and interests in life – as workers, members of families, members of voluntary organisation or people with a passion for a particular activity.

Making progress within a subject

Using computers provides a good example here. In recent years, community educators have developed a number of introductory courses with titles like 'Computers for the Terrified'. These can be held at rural locations using mobile projects, for example a bus fitted with computers or portable computers (laptops) in the boot of a tutor's car. From here progression is possible to the RSA CLAIT courses, which offer one term each of word-processing, the creation of databases and spreadsheets, with a certificate at the end of the course. From here, learners can go on to specialist courses for business and engineering applications, such as IBT (Integrated Business Technology) or CNC (Computer Numerical Control). This will certainly involve moving to a more central location, such as a community education centre in the nearest town or a further education college.

In some ways, IT is an easy example, because of the range of courses available. In an academic subject, a student may well find a GCSE subject available locally, but not an 'A' level. The same goes for people wanting to develop an interest in a specific craft subject by taking a City & Guilds course. One possible solution is to use supported open learning, related to a not too distant college, which can be visited for occasional tutorials or workshop sessions, or via a national scheme such as the one provided by the National Extension College. Residential centres, such as Denman College (for members of the Women's Institute), may also have a role to play. People who have done courses for voluntary organisations can take on the open learning courses available from Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education.

Supporting progression from one learning provider to another

When it comes to supporting progression, advice and guidance is an important aid. Learning Direct, the national freephone helpline (see page 69 for details), is especially good at identifying courses, including open learning courses, on a national basis. The helpline is less good at providing the precise details of local provision, which are so important to rural learners juggling with problems of childcare, travel and work. Alongside the development of Learning Partnerships, which link education and training providers in each area, the government also announced, in 1999, plans to develop guidance networks to ensure that more detailed information is fed into the national helpline, with local agencies to which enquirers can be referred for face-to-face help.

In order to progress, learners need to be able to shift from one provider to another and from relatively informal to relatively formal kinds of learning. This may conflict with organisational demands. For example, a harassed community education organiser, who has worked hard to establish a class in a village hall, may be very keen that the whole group should move on together at the end of the course. This may conflict with the desire of individual members of the group to look for an award-bearing course in the same subject in the nearest college, or to change to more formal learning in an unrelated subject.

The development of advice and guidance puts more power into the hands of the adult learner. Organisers and project workers need to be sensitive to this. In addition, learners moving from informal to more formal provision must be aware of the different demands this will make on them. There is a responsibility on both partners to facilitate this movement as much as possible.

While most colleges have developed excellent student support systems over recent years, for example, advice and guidance, study skills, help with basic skills, specialist advice on disability and so on, these services are much more likely to be available on-site at the college's main base, rather than off-site at a rural outreach location. The services may well have been developed with full-time, mostly younger, learners in mind, rather than part-time, mostly adult learners.

Review questions

Development and progression	*Relevant questions*
Getting people involved	What sorts of people do you want to become involved in learning? How do you intend to contact them and encourage them to take part?
Making learning available	What sorts of learning have you considered under the headings we suggested: ► for personal development ► related to work ► related to organisations people may belong to ► for community development? Who will you talk to in order to put some of this into action?
Basic skills	What basic skills needs are you aware of in your local area? Which agencies in the area might be able to help with this part of the work?

Accreditation	Do you understand the jargon of accreditation (open college credits, NVQs and so on)? Who will help you to learn more about accreditation? Where is your local Open College Network based?
Progression	Do you know enough about formal adult learning opportunities? How can you find out more? What advice and guidance is available in your area?

Looking to the future

Does the work you are doing have a future?

Not all projects are sustainable in the long term. Sometimes the purpose of a project is to find out whether a particular way of working is feasible or not. Finding out that it is not feasible may be a successful outcome for the project, even if it means you have to look for another job!

Some professional people have an over-neat-and-tidy view of life. So in evaluating the outcomes of a particular project, undue emphasis is often placed on issues of 'what next?' and progression. Participants, on the other hand, may very well have educational ambitions and aspirations for the future, but they might also want to get on with other aspects of their life, using the skills they have acquired to get a job, develop a leisure interest, or enjoy the company of new friends they have made during the lifetime of the project.

It is the responsibility of the education worker to think about how adult learning can be sustained for people who want to carry on learning. In the Hope project described earlier, this was possible using existing resources within a community, but further funding may also be an important part of this ongoing activity.

In this section, we offer some general ideas about sustaining adult learning, and examples of what has been possible in rural areas.

Sustainability

Sustainability can mean two things. Firstly sustainability for you as a person. Secondly, sustainability for the work your project is carrying out.

From a personal point of view, you must ensure that your own personal development and training are built into the ways of working in the project, even if it was not specified in the job description. By this we mean attending the occasional conference where you can meet and network with people with similar interests, and finding ways to meet your own training needs on adult learning, on rural issues, on IT, and so on. If you are involved in drawing up budgets, then this needs to be included.

From a project point of view, there are two possibilities. Either your project becomes regarded as 'a specialist unit' providing a specialist service to

other agencies, or you become absorbed into the structure of a parent organisation as part of their 'normal' everyday work – whether it be the health services, social services, economic development, an adult education service or college or a Rural Community Council.

Some short-term projects are so successful that a statutory agency decides to continue the work at the end of the project's lifetime. In the next example, the issue involves the well-known problem of rural transport. The solutions are much debated, with more buses, cheap taxi schemes and shared private transport all being canvassed and attempted as solutions. The scheme in Gloucestershire addressed the problem more directly. As most rural people depend on private transport, how could they be helped to become more independent by solving their individual transport problems? The success of this scheme has meant that the rural local authorities in the county have been prepared to take over the ongoing funding.

Transport for unemployed people in Gloucestershire

Jump Start offers a range of options to help unemployed people in rural Gloucestershire access work: a moped lease scheme, a small grants scheme to help people get cars back on the road, subsidised driving lessons and a bicycle hire scheme in the Forest of Dean. It was originally designed to support young unemployed people, but it has now extended to older unemployed people and to women returners. The development phase, with Gloucestershire Rural Community Council as the main funder, was so successful that the Gloucestershire local authorities (excluding the cities of Cheltenham and Gloucester) have taken on the funding. Jump Start tackles directly the problems that rural people have in accessing both jobs and training opportunities.

Building relations and thinking ahead

No one is irreplaceable. But there is a lot to be said for striving to make yourself, and the work you do, into something that local people feel they cannot do without. This is why we have placed such emphasis on the notion of partnership. If you and your project become well known for being able to do things that other people cannot do, reach out into local communities in a way that other agencies cannot, you will find that you soon become desirable as a partner – not just for existing work but for future funding bids as well.

Let us suppose that your project has received funding for one year only. Given the normal sorts of time-scales for bidding into project funds, you will have to think about future funding from day one in the job. Because assessing bids and allocating funds, with the best will in the world, is not an exact science, you should be prepared to make a number of bids. Applications need to be closely related to the criteria for funding, in order to succeed. It is always surprising how many bidders ignore the opportunity for a preliminary discussion with the agency administering the grants. It is also crucial to evaluate your work on a regular basis, so that you can provide clear evidence of your success to date.

Money – and knowing a person who can . . .

If you are thinking about finding further funding to extend the lifetime of the project, then this section is for you. Funding agencies usually distinguish between:

capital funding – for example, for a grandiose plan to set up a major rural learning centre, or a more modest plan to buy computer or workshop equipment

revenue funding – or the money you need to pay for rent of premises, lighting, heating, the salary of the project worker, support for childcare and transport, tutor fees, computer consumables and so on.

Sometimes, special funders assume that a relevant local body should cover revenue costs if they take responsibility for capital items. Quite often, funding applications founder because this equation cannot be put together. For both capital and revenue contributions, external funders may require 'matched' or comparable funding, in cash or kind, from a local council budget, which may be a problem.

There are hundreds of ways of raising money, both small and large amounts. It would be impossible to list them all. But this is where the notion of 'knowing a person who can . . .' comes in. Here are some ideas for useful contacts:

- The county Adult Education Officer
- NIACE
- The Rural Community Council in your area
- ACRE
- The Countryside Agency
- Parish councils
- The Economic Development Unit in your local authority.

Libraries and Economic Development Units usually keep directories of grant-making bodies, both national and local, including the publications of the Directory of Social Change. There are also a number of web-sites, and many of the comments we made earlier about networking are relevant to locating funders.

The example below demonstrates how important and successful projects can evolve through different funding regimes.

Woodlands skills for travellers

The Woodlands Skills Training links the management of woodlands with the skills and employment needs of an itinerant labour force of travellers. The role of a travellers' support group called 'Friends, Families and Travellers' was crucial because it has the trust of the client group, involves travellers in its decision-making processes and is able to accurately identify their needs. Woodlands management has been neglected in recent years, partly because of the lack of a skilled workforce, willing and able to travel to different locations around the country. Travellers depend on seasonal work, and woodlands management is especially useful because it takes place in winter. Originally the training was provided from a mobile base, moving around the southern and western counties, but it is now on a fixed site near Exeter. In the first year, 60 travellers completed training and demand is now running ahead of supply. Courses include theory, practical work, work

experience and vocational guidance. Feedback from travellers who have completed the course indicates that it is a way of sustaining their traditional way of life.

Initial funding was from the ACRE CountryWork initiative, but it now uses the European Social Fund.

Being businesslike

Although the term *business plan* comes from business management, it is now one that fits neatly into the adult learning scene, provided you remember that the 'bottom line' is the service you offer to people in your area rather than the end-of-financial-year balance!

A business plan sets out what you want to achieve and how you intend to pay for it. It shows the money that you expect to receive (income) and what you intend to spend it on (expenditure). On the *income side* of the plan you will have your funding agencies, hopefully a major one plus one or more minor ones. There will also be the cost of providing training for other agencies who want to use your particular skills and knowledge. It is not good practice to do something simply because someone has been kind enough to ask you. They probably have a secure full-time job, you do not: costing your time is central to the financial viability of your project. It is of course quite different if you are asked to put on training for a voluntary organisation with no funding, something which may well be part of the purpose of your project. Other sources of income are publications; if you have good ideas, why not disseminate them.

On the *expenditure side*, there will be the various items on which you spend money. This might be divided into expenditure directly related to what the project is about – for example, outreach, putting on events and courses, hire of premises for these purposes and so on, and then administration. You will certainly need a good quality computer with a warranty and service agreement, but do you need a brand-new desk to put it on? Often items of second-hand office furniture can be begged or purchased very cheaply. Some projects spend a lot on designing expensive cards and stationery, when these can be produced on your own computer at a fraction of the cost. Even if you do not know how to do this, it may be cheaper to go on a short course to learn (or send an assistant if you have one) than to pay the bill. You may also find that some services are available at cost from a Community Resource Centre or from the Economic Development Unit. It is always worth asking.

Community self-help

Rural communities are not just dependent on the goodwill of outside agencies. It is rare to visit any village in the country without seeing at least one notice advertising a village fund-raising event. If you want to do something which cannot be funded from project funds and if local people want it to happen sufficiently, they will be prepared to fund-raise in all the well-known ways. Such events can be fun and can bring a community together around a joint initiative. Necessity can quickly turn into a virtue.

In addition to coffee mornings and raffles, you might encourage activists in the community to think about the following ideas:

- painting marathons
- sponsored duck races
- sponsored more-or-less-anything-you-can-think-of
- auctions of promises
- quizzes
- pub collections
- ugliest ornament competitions
- wheelie-bin or pram races.

You will almost certainly be able to add to this list! And never be afraid to copy a good idea from another village. Be certain that if you have a good idea, which has local support and has been clearly thought through, you will always find money somewhere.

Review questions

Looking to the future	*Relevant questions*
Thinking about the future	What are realistic possibilities? What do local people want?
Sources of funding	Where can you go for advice and information about funding?
Sustainability	What plans do you have for your own future and for the future of the work you are involved in? What kind of partnerships might be possible with other agencies? What are the unique aspects of your work?
Fund-raising	Are you clear about how to organise, or advise groups on organising, fund-raising events?

SECTION THREE

Getting organised

Section Three is our nuts-and-bolts section. It carries practical advice on 'how to do it'.

- Each sub-section begins with a short explanation.
- 'Quick tips' summarise the main points to bear in mind.
- There are references to relevant resources to be found in Section Four of the guide.

Using interviews, questionnaires and other sources of information in order to define needs

'Needs' are slippery customers. Recognising 'needs' implies recognising what the people you are there to serve really want. But people do not always know. They may be dissatisfied with their lives, depressed or angry, and still have no clear view on where they want to get to. Or if they know, no clear idea about how to get there. In circumstances like these, 'defining needs' can sometimes come down to what professionals in education, social services, health, and so on, think is best for them. Being sensitive to people's needs means connecting the big issues in rural areas – poverty, isolation, jobs, transport, childcare – with the individual people who experience some, or all, of these problems.

A 'needs analysis' tries to get round the problem described above by asking people what they want, in a way that sets up a dialogue. This can be done by questionnaire, by interview or by running a series of focus groups. Suggestions are made and views canvassed. Of course, in evaluating answers, it's not just a matter of what gets the most votes. As we explained in Section One, some people find it much more difficult than others to make their voices heard. Even if most of the investigation is being carried out by post, you may need to do some door-knocking round the village council estate or in outlying hamlets in order to get a representative set of views. Your own professional judgement will be vital in:

- organising the questionnaires, interviews and focus groups
- evaluating the responses
- feeding them back to local people in a clear, straightforward way
- setting up a dialogue about how to turn 'needs' into action.

One useful approach to analysing the results of questionnaires is to focus on the problems that people raise. These can be followed up through structured interviews, to gain a better purchase on what people mean, how the problems are perceived and how proposed solutions might work. The range of responses from these interviews can then be used in a democratic way, which might involve focus groups and/or a series of meetings with different cross-sections of people. In this way you would be involving local people in the analytical process itself.

Questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and other sources of information

Drawing up a questionnaire – quick tips

- Be clear about the purpose of the questionnaire and how the information is going to be used.
- Include questions which invite people's own views, rather than asking them to answer yes/no to your ideas. For example, instead of asking if people would support a particular activity (say badminton or parent education) at a village hall, you might ask: which of the following list of activities would you like to see at the village hall? Leave some space for 'other suggestions'.
- Make sure you include enough space for people to add their own comments.
- Make sure the tone is not intimidating. Do not insist that people give their name/address/telephone number, but invite them to do so. This allows you to follow up comments and creates an instant mailing-list.
- Think carefully about length. Six well-chosen questions are better than a dozen vague ones. As a rule-of-thumb, two sides of A4 are more likely to get a good response than four.
- Discuss the questions in advance with relevant local organisations – for example, the Parish Council or WI. Try them out on a few people you trust just to make sure questions are not ambiguous or misleading.
- Include questions about the existing skills that people have, as well as skills they might want to learn.
- You need as many replies as possible. If you are sending the questionnaire by post, then enclose a stamped addressed envelope. If you have local volunteers, taking the questionnaire round in person is very effective.

See 'Village appraisals' in Section Four for a very useful publication from Scotland. This includes a really helpful and funny exercise on how to conduct a questionnaire and how *not* to do so.

Interviewing

It is possible to administer a questionnaire on a face-to-face basis but it depends on how much people-power you have. Try to get a representative sample. Equally, you may want to have a less structured discussion with local individuals and groups, for example a village hall committee.

Quick tips

- Make sure you have clear headings, much as you would in a questionnaire.
- Design a standard form for recording the information, much like a questionnaire form.
- Try to encourage people to open up about their views on the village. For example, show an interest in what people are saying and encourage them by using positive body language.
- Avoid confrontations. It's not a good idea to argue with the people during an interview, even if they say things that you find offensive – the time for argument is later.
- Recording answers is important. Always ask permission if you want to use a tape-recorder. If you are keeping a written record, a useful skill to practise is writing and maintaining eye contact at the same time.

Focus groups

Focus groups can be used in two ways. You can bring together groups of people in the village to discuss the problems they face and to suggest and debate possible solutions. This is rather like a group interview, but does allow people to respond directly to each other's points. It can also be a helpful way of bringing into the open different views about what the village 'community' is and how it might develop in the future. This is very important, because at some point the village may well have to decide on priorities for community development. It is better if this is agreed on the basis of 'this problem is more important than that one', than on the basis of 'this project got more votes than that one' in a questionnaire survey.

Using statistical information

Another form of needs analysis is based on statistical information about social and economic conditions in a particular community. Sources for such information include the County Planning Department, the District Council Social Services Department or Economic Development Unit, the Parish Council, the Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) or Business Link. Statistics need to be treated with care. For example:

- Three per cent unemployment might seem low, but in a village of 1,000 it means 30 people. Their position will almost certainly feel far worse if village life is dominated by incomers with well-paid, skilled jobs outside the immediate locality.
- Seventy-five per cent car ownership may appear high, but it also means that 250 people in a village of 1,000 people have no car, and others (especially women) do not have use of a car in the daytime when their partners are using the car for work.

However the information is gathered, it is vital to recognise that problems are important, even if they are experienced only by a minority of residents.

The example below shows how the use of statistical information can be integrated with needs analysis and work towards a village appraisal.

Needs analysis at Hailsham, East Sussex

The needs analysis was conducted by Susan McGrath, a consultant who had lived and worked in the area for some years, for a Community College in this small Sussex town which serves a wide rural area. The first stage was to collect population, social and economic data about the area, using District and County Council sources. It was also important to look at what buildings were available for putting on activities and to draw up a list of voluntary organisations with an interest in learning. Susan McGrath writes: 'I think it is very important to work through local people rather than come into a rural community unannounced, to avoid tensions and appearing to be imposing solutions from outside without consultation.' Once the needs analysis is complete, it needs to be discussed with whatever local networks are available, in order to work out what learning activities can be put on, how they are to be funded, how guidance can be given to learners, and what progression routes are available.

Village appraisals

Village appraisals have been mentioned several times, in passing, in this guide. A village appraisal is like a needs analysis, but is usually much broader in scope. So it may include issues such as the visual appearance of the village or the state of footpaths, as well as village activities and facilities.

Begin by finding out whether villages in your patch have carried out an appraisal and what has happened as a result. It could be that there is valuable information which creates a short-cut for your work, but it may be that the information needs updating. It is possible that the existing appraisal has little to say about social and learning needs, or that the village has changed so much that you have to start again.

If you want to work with a rural community on a village appraisal, it is best to work through the parish council and/or the Rural Community Council. There is some specialist software available to help with the process, and this is listed in Section Four, page 74, under 'Village appraisals'. Also useful is the *Rural Community Appraisal Handbook* mentioned on the same page.

Quick tips

- In a needs analysis, always try to offer alternatives and invite opinions.
- For a village appraisal to work, it has to be done by a group representing a broad cross-section of village opinion. It is a long-term process which cannot be rushed.
- If someone tries to tell you what people 'need', always ask them how they know.
- If in doubt about what figures mean, ask the people who are being described.
- Check carefully for existing needs analyses and appraisals before you begin work.

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Supporting adult learning: rules and regulations

There are many specific barriers to adult learning in rural areas. Childcare, money, places to meet and transport are four that come to mind immediately. There are ways and means around these barriers, but there are also rules and regulations that you need to follow.

Childcare

Things to think about:

- Will the activities you have planned fit within people's arrangements for taking children to school and bringing them home?
- Will some people want to bring pre-school children with them?
- What kind and quality of facilities are needed?
- Who will provide childcare?

In a rural area, travel time may mean that it is simply not possible for a woman to deliver and collect children at school, and to travel to an adult learning activity in another village or nearby town, in between. The success of mobile projects, which take learning to scattered communities and provide both learning and childcare, is one possible answer. Another is to provide an integrated multi-purpose centre for childcare, health education, and so on.

Such examples give an idea of what may be possible in the future, but in practice you are much more likely to find yourself setting up an *ad hoc* creche in a village hall. This means that you will need to know a bit about the 1989 Children's Act, with its strong emphasis on child safety, in particular:

- the regulations about the numbers of children per adult
- restrictions on people who can be employed in childcare.

It also raises issues about insurance. But childcare provision has good networks and it should be no problem to find someone in social services to brief you about what is required to provide safe childcare.

Travel

Things to think about:

- Do people live within walking distance?
- Do they have their own cars?
- Can people share cars?
- Is there a local authority community transport organisation which might be able to help?

Organising adult learning activities can also mean facilitating transport-sharing schemes between people who want to come to a group session. If there are people prepared to use their own cars, they will need to check with their own insurance firms before doing so. Most local authorities have a community transport scheme which can hire minibuses, but you may have to provide a trained driver – so start looking for a volunteer at once if you intend to pursue this.

Places to meet

Things to think about:

- Do you need a one-off venue or a regular meeting-place?
- What do you want to organise and how will this affect the place you choose?
- How can you be sure people will feel comfortable with the place you choose?

This may mean a village hall, a spare room in a village school, a private house, the upstairs room at the pub. Always ask, as local people are much better placed than you to know what is possible if you are a relative newcomer to an area. But you also need to check if there are any restrictions, for example on numbers, or on use of equipment, on music or alcohol. If you plan to serve drinks, you will need a licence. Bear in mind that a place that may seem appropriate to one person can seem intimidating to another. Be clear about who you want to come and what *they* will feel comfortable with.

Despite open learning schemes, people still need to meet. Partly this is social, because rural life can often be quite lonely, but also because the social context is often what motivates people to learn and supports them through the difficult stages. It is very common to meet experienced adult learners who, when asked to describe how they got started, say 'I only went because a friend was going.'

For one-off events, especially during the summer, you can be more adventurous about venues. For example, a marquee may cost less to hire than a hall. People's gardens, village greens or well-known local beauty spots have all been hosts to learning activities. But if you are planning an open-air event, you will need a contingency plan as well.

If you are providing food and drink as part of an event or activity, you must ensure that you comply with any relevant health and hygiene regulations.

Money

Things to think about:

- What can you offer free and what should you charge for?
- How can you make sure charges reflect people's different abilities to pay?
- What kinds of local funds might be available for supporting people who cannot pay?

You will need to be very clear about what you can offer free and what you need to make a charge for. If charging is necessary for your budget, how can you be sure that this will not prevent the very people the activity was designed for from attending? There are a number of possibilities to investigate:

- You may require some fee income for your budget, and to be able to offer remissions to people on benefits or on low incomes. This will not work if

your activity is aimed at unemployed or older people, most of whom qualify for remissions.

- If the activity is being run by another agency – for example, a local authority or college – they will probably have a policy on fee remissions, though these policies are sometimes less than generous.
- There may be some funding available from national charities to enable specific people to take part, for example people with hearing or sight impairment.
- There are also some local charitable funds which can be used to support learning activities, although these may well have tight restrictions such as 'only for people born in the county of x'.
- Specific funds may be available from local authorities to help with transport, childcare or the hire of premises.

Quick tips

- ► Keep a list of all meeting-places on your patch, including details of cost and of any restrictions on use.
- ► Make up your own checklist of 'things to get sorted' before hiring a hall, setting up childcare, providing food and drink, and so on.
- ► Keep careful details of national and local charities, as well as local authorities, which may be able to help with funding for individual learners, or under particular headings, such as transport and childcare.
- ► If you are using an outside agency to put on a learning activity, be sure what their funding regime says about fee remissions. Be prepared to find additional funding if remissions are too small.
- ► Contact the Countryside Agency to find out if any part of your patch is in a Rural Development Area – this can have funding implications.

You will find NIACE, ACRE and Directory for Social Change (all listed in Section Four) of particular help in following up the issues raised here. ACRE's *Rural Arts Handbook* has a particularly useful section called 'Getting the show on the road'.

Publicity and communication

Good publicity and communication can take a number of forms. For example:

- If you want to produce publicity aimed at professional people operating in your patch, you can use professional jargon as shorthand, knowing that people will understand.
- If you want to send publicity to organisations within the rural community, you can assume that the secretary will take reasonable notice of what you send, though it may need a follow-up phone call as well. Indeed, this sort of publicity often lays the ground for a phone call, and is much better than 'cold-calling', where you try to explain over the phone who you are and what you want.
- If you want to aim publicity at the people you want to serve, this needs to be eye-catching as well as informative. It can take the form of small posters in shop windows or on parish notice-boards. Leaflets can go house-to-house if you've got a friendly volunteer or can pay to have them delivered with a free paper. Or you can drop piles of them at the village shop, pub, surgery, village hall, school – anywhere that people congregate.

So far, we have assumed you are trying to get publicity for your own project, but as part of your work you may very well be advising local organisations about publicity and putting on training courses. Often the Rural Community Council, college or local authority Adult/Community Education will help you to find a suitable tutor for this sort of very practical course, though you may soon have confidence about doing this sort of training yourself.

Using the media

Another important form of publicity is 'media coverage.' This can range from writing an article for a parish magazine or village newsletter, to an item on a regional TV programme. Local papers are often happy to print a press release more or less verbatim, especially if you have a good picture to go with it. An uninteresting picture of people sitting around a table is not good: you need to get in close to your subject and provide a strong image of somebody actually *doing* something, the sort of photo that 'really tells a story'.

Local radio and television is a hit-and-miss affair, but always worth a try if your story has a strong 'personal interest' angle, and is a bit out of the ordinary. In general, radio is a better bet than television – there is simply more of it and it is more local.

Communications: keeping in touch

Networking, partnerships and the value of information and communications technologies (ICT) are all life support systems for the rural adult education worker. What follows is by way of summary:

A good quality leaflet is a useful tool for introducing the project to other professional people.

Posters and leaflets meant for your target population should be bright, cheerful and avoid jargon and professional language like the plague.

For example 'activities you can try your hand at' is more appealing than 'taster courses'. Sometimes, a more folksy hand-drawn poster can be more effective than a professionally printed one in getting across the message that an event is going to be friendly and informal.

The telephone is very useful for finding out who you need to speak to in an organisation, but sending your information leaflet in advance may make for a much better informed chat.

Door-stepping or hanging out around the village shop and pub are probably better ways of making direct contact with people than cold-calling people by phone.

A project newsletter is great, but the more informal the better if you're sending it to your participants. Professionals can put their own 'spin' on informal language, but local people won't be able to make any sense of adult learning jargon. Fax or e-mail newsletters are handy for (some) professionals but exclude too many people to be of general use.

E-mail is fast and cheap, especially if you want to send documents, eg a draft of a newsletter or report. But it's a mistake to say it's instantaneous, because the person you send it to still has to retrieve it from their server. Never assume that a message has arrived without checking first.

Face-to-face is best of all, but do you really want to spend all your project budget on driving round the countryside?

Quick tips

- Press releases should include date, time, place of event, cost (if any), telephone number (for the editor to contact you with questions) and, if possible, a photo or mention of a photo opportunity for the newspaper's photographer.
- There is such a thing as bad publicity – for example, 'treasurer disappears with village hall funds', 'sex scandal on parish council'. Whether this affects your work directly or it affects a local organisation that is asking your advice, the best advice is always to distance the organisation (good) from the individual (may be bad, but you do not want to comment).
- If you want to put on some informal training on publicity and communications, go on a course yourself, to build your own confidence and skills.
- Always keep at least two copies of your project address/phone book, perhaps one on computer, one in a book, just in case! The same with lists of places to put up posters or drop leaflets.
- Aim to be the kind of person who always knows who to talk to, both for yourself, and also for other people asking your advice.
- If you hold an event, meeting or course, it is always good to ask people how they heard about it, to see how your publicity has worked.

Effective working and evaluation

Evaluation is very simple – the object is to know what you have achieved. But it can also be very complicated. For example, your project may have specified numerical outcomes in terms of number of village communities contacted, number of learning activities set up, number of people participating in activities. However, you may find that what people actually want is rather different. This is where a Steering Group (a small committee set up to represent funders and users) can be very helpful – it is much easier to change tack with support, than in isolation. But at the end of the day, you will have to find ways to account for the fact that numerical targets have, or have not, been reached, or successes have taken an unanticipated turn.

There are two ways of measuring the outcomes of your project. You can keep a record and build up statistics of what has been done and who has benefited. But you can also ask people what they thought about a particular activity or event and write down, or record, their responses. Photos or video can be used to illustrate the account.

An important distinction is between the evaluation you carry out during the project – which can be used to re-formulate and fine-tune the work – and the evaluation you carry out towards the end, which reviews what has happened. In some ways, the first is the more important because it can be used to support a new funding application or to argue the case for incorporating your project into a part of mainstream Community Education, Social Services or the Health Service.

Collecting information

The range of statistical information you need to collect includes:

- the number of people that participated in the activities you organised
- details of their sex, age, ethnicity, employment status, and so on.
- details of their educational background – the simplest question to get at this is 'What is your highest educational qualification, if any?'
- details of which villages or hamlets they come from.

You can normally collect that information when people start an activity. At the end of a particular event, activity or course, it's a good idea to get people to complete an evaluation form. You can ask simple Yes/No questions such as:

- Did you find it useful?
- Did you enjoy it?
- Were the arrangements for transport/childcare satisfactory?

But it will probably be more helpful to ask questions such as:

- Which part of the day/course did you enjoy most?
- What new skills have you learned?
- How could the event/day/course have been improved?
- What sort of activities do you think you might want to take part in later?

Some people will not feel they can respond frankly if they have to supply personal details, but if you give them the option, it allows you to follow points up and to contact them in person later if, for example, they have requested a particular follow-up activity. You can also have an evaluation meeting of a group, which allows them to discuss their experience and, sometimes, to modify their opinions – this is especially useful in planning future events.

Evaluation, inspections and reports

It is always possible that someone from your funding agency may decide to pay a call. You will normally have some warning, but you cannot invent evidence from scratch, unless you are very unscrupulous indeed. We suggest you use some of the techniques suggested here to make sure you always have something to show a visiting VIP. The habit of collecting evaluative evidence as you go along is also very useful when it comes to writing project reports.

Quick tips

- Keep a (**private**) diary – where you go, who you see, what you talk about, the activities and events that take place in your project, and also some personal reflections on the project as it unfolds. Don't lose it . . .
- Develop a (**public**) scrap-book – it often happens that someone calls on a quiet day for the project, so having a scrap-book full of copies of leaflets, newsletters, photos of events, steering group minutes, press cuttings and so on, can give visitors a much fuller idea of what your project is about.
- Build in **evaluation** to any event or activity you hold, by making sure there is a brief survey form to fill in at the end of the event. This can be prefaced (or replaced) by a short discussion along similar lines to those suggested above: did you enjoy it? was it useful? what will you take away from this? what else do you think you'd like to do? Even, 'what did you learn?'
- Aim at a **good balance of statistics and people's views** in your evaluation.
- **Trust what people say** – if they enjoyed it, but you didn't, that may be your problem, not theirs.

Organising events

This can be daunting. There is so much to think about – when? where? who? refreshments? speaker? advertising? There never seems to be enough time, and you never know how many people are going to come – 500, 50 or 5. But most people have experience of organising something, whether it's a children's birthday party, a jumble sale, a protest petition. You probably know from bitter experience what to avoid and the kinds of things that can go wrong.

Events can be for people already involved in a project, or as a means of bringing new people into it. One way of reducing the strain of an event is to be part of someone else's, for example a stall at a village fete, county show or craft fair. But you still need to have some idea about who is likely to come and how they fit in with the aims of your project, otherwise you may either

have a very boring day or be swamped by people that your project is *not* aimed at.

Events can be very enjoyable, a strong motivator for those not yet involved, and a way of building motivation and commitment for people who have been involved for some time. They can be a way of getting at a large number of people quite quickly. They are a good way of publicising your project. They can boost your own confidence as well.

Quick tips

- If possible, set up an organising group, but one that is short on bureaucracy and long on delegating tasks to other people. Two months is adequate, but by no means an excessive planning time for most events.
- Identify the target group, make sure that your organising group understands that, and then make sure that the venue, 'tone' and publicity for the event are appropriate.
- Try to plan for more than you really expect – spare leaflets can be used again, while spare refreshments can be shared out at the end to your organising group as a way of saying thank you.
- If the event is in winter, check heating in the planned location and the same for ventilation in summer.
- Think carefully about whether you need to lay on childcare for parents or transport for people from outlying hamlets (or other villages if the area covered is wider).
- If you have speakers, brief them very carefully about the audience and purpose of the evening, and the time allocated to them. Do not promise OHPs or slide projectors unless you are sure you can get them.
- Always delegate a reliable person to register people as they arrive, not least because their names and addresses will create an important contacts list.
- Check that your event does not clash with other village events or with major public events such as the Cup Final or a royal wedding.

Time and managing yourself

Working in rural areas can be a stressful business, especially if:

- you have a short-term contract with pressure to 'show quick results'
- you are physically isolated from other members of your team and people doing similar work in other rural areas
- You are working in communities with deep divisions and significant, and often unacknowledged, deprivation
- you feel that your enthusiasm and interest are met with mistrust and indifference by the people you are trying to serve
- you have got a wide range of tasks to organise, for example you may be working across a patch with a number of separate communities

- you feel stretched by the different demands of the job.

We all know some of the symptoms of being 'stressed out' – difficulty sleeping but always feeling tired, failing to see the funny side of things or to keep things in perspective, over-indulgence in food and drink, wondering what happened to your social life. The following basic principles refer to ways of keeping the job within limits and manageable:

- Good time management will help you set priorities for the project and avoid wasting too much time on side-issues.
- Assertiveness is about letting people know very clearly where you stand.
- Obtaining support will help to combat isolation and the natural tendency to panic when the project goes pear-shaped.
- Skills development is about increasing your own ability, and that of team members or volunteers, to deal with the demands of the job.

Quick tips

Time management

- Set realistic short- and longer-term targets.
- Decide what can be achieved realistically at the beginning of each week, and use your diary to plan work as well as record meetings, events, and so on.
- Make lists, highlight the priority tasks, and keep them where you can see them.
- Never say you will take on an extra task without finding a slot in your diary when you can do it.
- Try to keep travelling and meetings to a minimum.

Assertiveness

- Decide what is 'non-negotiable' in the job (eg not tolerating racist remarks) and let people around you know.
- If you have a difficult meeting, work out in advance what you feel and want, how to say it, and what will constitute a reasonable outcome, bearing in mind that the other person may have strong views and feelings too.
- Don't confuse being assertive with being loud, aggressive or manipulative.

Support

- Your job may come with a support group (steering group, advisory group, and so on). If not, consider setting one up – but keep it small.
- If you have an 'official' support group that is not supportive, for example members who criticise without making constructive suggestions, then set up an unofficial one of people you know and trust.
- Identify one person who shares your values and aims, and make sure you meet up on a regular fortnightly basis to talk about what's happening in your lives and jobs.

- Keep the job in perspective – good friends are your best support, even if you never even mention work.

Skills development

- Courses are available on assertiveness and time management, often as single-day courses which are easier to fit into your diary than two hours a week for 10 weeks.
- Courses are also available in a wide range of other skills that you may need to acquire rapidly, for example health and safety or desktop publishing (to produce leaflets and newsletters).
- See 'Who's who in education' (page 64) for ideas on training providers.
- Contact Learning Direct (page 69) to find a suitable course.

SECTION FOUR

Resources

This Section comes in two parts. In Part A, you will find a 'Who's Who in Education', which you can easily customise for your own reference. Part B contains a list of agencies, books and web-sites which may be useful to you from time to time.

Resources are accurate at the time of going to print, but please bear in mind that the titles of organisations, their addresses and phone numbers all change. We have given some Internet web-sites but new ones are being added all the time. Both parts are organised in alphabetical order.

Part A
A Who's Who of Education and Training for Adults

A lot of the work you do will involve informal learning in community groups. However, you need to know about more formal education and training providers, as well as voluntary organisations with a specific learning remit, for the following reasons:

- They can help you to find suitable tutors if you want to put on courses in rural locations.
- They can be a source of additional ideas, suggestions and resources for your project.
- Learners you are in contact with may want to progress to more formal learning opportunities.
- You may know learners who have particular learning requirements, for example basic skills, which they want to do something about, so you need to know what agencies to turn to.

Because education and training is organised at a local, usually county, level, we have listed a number of national organisations, together with the sort of local organisations that should exist in your area. You can use the NIACE *Adult Learning Yearbook* (see page 69) to research these.

What's in a name?

Because education is decentralised, the same title can mean quite different things. For example, a Further Education College in an urban area may be a Community College in a rural area, based on a comprehensive school with attached local authority Adult Community Education and, sometimes, leisure facilities as well.

'Agricultural' and land-based colleges. Many of these have successfully diversified as the rural work-base itself has diversified. This implies a range of courses in land-based subjects (horticulture, bee-keeping, organic methods, horses, domestic animals). Some have also extended their activities into areas such as IT. They may not use 'agricultural' or 'land-based' in their title at all.

Colleges (sometimes called Further Education Colleges or Community Colleges) run academic and vocational courses for school-leavers and adults. They often have several sites and sometimes engage in outreach work.

The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) has overall charge of education and training and its publications and web-site are a valuable source of information on government initiatives.

DfEE
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT
Tel: 020 7925 5000

DfEE
Moorfoot
Sheffield S1 4PQ
Tel: 0114 275 3275
Web-site: www.dfee.gov.uk

Economic Development Units

One local government department you may find yourself working with is an Economic Development Unit, based in a district or county council. Such units generally recognise training as an integral part of trying to generate locally based employment in rural areas. Ring the local council for details.

Health Services and Social Services

Your own background may well be in this area, and your own project based within health or social services. Increasingly, adult learning is seen as closely related to social policy. This can include **Health Education** in the broadest sense, and work with adults living in stressful circumstances (including disability, learning difficulties, difficult family circumstances and the elderly). This may include adults living in various types of sheltered accommodation. Even if work of this kind is not happening, health and care workers may see your arrival on the patch as a chance to get something going.

Local Education Authorities

Local Education Authorities (LEAs) are responsible for schools and for **Adult**, often called **Community Education**. You might want to contact them for names, addresses and telephone numbers of village schools, or to see how your project fits in with the work of the local Community Education (CE) organiser. In rural areas, their programmes include a lot of leisure courses, but may also include taster courses (especially IT), advice and guidance work, the use of mobile projects (eg buses with computers, children's play facilities, quiet areas for guidance interviews), and links with voluntary organisations. Basic skills covers literacy, numeracy (and sometimes IT as well) – ask the CE organiser to tell you how Basic Skills is organised in the area.

Older learners

Older learners are welcome throughout the education and training system. In practice, you will find that particular organisations, such as local authority community education and the WEA, take a particular interest in providing learning opportunities for older people. For older women, Women's Institutes (see below under 'voluntary organisations') have a long tradition of providing informal learning for women. NIACE publishes a regular free newsletter called 'Older and Bolder'.

In many areas, self-help learning organisations have sprung up under the University of the Third Age (U3A) badge. For local U3A groups, contact:

University of the Third Age
26 Harrison Street
London WC1H 8JG
Tel: 020 7837 8838

Open College Networks

To find out about your local Open College Network, contact:

National Open College Network
University of Derby
Kedleston Road
Derby DE22 1GB
Tel: 01332 622712
Web-site: www.nocn.ac.uk

Local OCNs are listed in NIACE's *Adult Learning Yearbook* (see page 69).

Open learning This is a growing field, but two key organisations which offer a wide variety of courses are:

National Extension College
18 Brooklands Avenue
Cambridge CB2 2HN
Tel: 01223 450200

The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes MK7 6AA
Tel: 01908 654316

The Open University has 10 regional offices in England, which are all listed in NIACE's *Adult Learning Yearbook* (see page 69).

Rural Development Agencies (RDAs)

These will complement the work of the local authority Economic Development Units and the Training and Enterprise Councils. They will ensure that the link between education and training and economic development is made at a regional level. For more details, contact the DETR (see government departments, page 70).

Schools

Schools are relevant for a number of reasons. Mostly, they provide premises in villages which can also be used for adult learning. They are places where parents gather and through which they can be contacted. A large number of rural primary schools are now involved with family or parent education projects which aim to use parents to support their own children's learning, but which can also be access points for the parents' own learning too. The LEA can provide you with a complete list of schools.

Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs)/Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs)

From April 2001, the TECs will be replaced by a network of area Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs), which will work with the new Rural Development Agencies (RDAs). Their task is to co-ordinate work-related education and training at a local level. They are important for keeping you up to date on key government initiatives such as Individual Learning Accounts and the University for Industry (Ufl), which are already having a major impact on the field of lifelong learning. There is a complete list of existing TECs in NIACE's *Adult Learning Yearbook* (see page 69).

Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs)

The availability of government money through TECs (LSCs) for Individual Learning Accounts, between 1999 and 2002, will be a major boost to demand for adult learning. Paying for learning is always a problem and, in deprived rural communities, this will be an important new source of funding for people who want to pursue a formal course or open learning package. It may also be possible to 'pool' ILAs for a community learning project.

Universities

Universities (plus other colleges of higher education) organise degree and other higher education courses. They usually have a programme of less formal courses, but it is important to enquire carefully from the Lifelong Learning, or Access, or Continuing Education, office about what sort of people these courses are intended for.

Voluntary organisations

Voluntary organisations abound in rural areas. People learn in voluntary organisations through their work and involvement. For example, in relation to parents and children, you may well find Parent Teacher Associations at village schools, voluntary playgroups or pre-schools linked to the Pre-school Learning Alliance, holiday play schemes and women's groups. A useful rule of thumb here is that if you have a project in mind and talk about it to the people who are intended to benefit, they will soon tell you about local groups and organisations, however informal, which are concerned with similar issues and which may be good partners for the project.

Two voluntary organisations active in rural areas have a specific adult learning brief:

The **Women's Institute** is educational in a number of ways. First, the experience of belonging to, and contributing to running, an exclusively women's organisation has given many rural women an experience of self-management and public office. This includes the organisation and work connected with the popular WI markets, at which craft and food products are sold directly to the consumer. Second, the speakers at WI meetings constitute an important form of adult learning. Third, an extensive educational programme is run at the residential Denman College near Abingdon in Oxfordshire.

National Federation of Women's Institutes
NFWI Unit
Denman College
Marcham
Abingdon
Oxfordshire. OX13 6NW
Tel: 01865 391788

The **Workers' Educational Association** (WEA) has a democratic branch structure but also employs full- and part-time staff. Local programmes vary widely and it is always worth contacting the local WEA district office to find out what is going on in your area. Addresses are in NIACE's *Adult Learning Yearbook* (see page 69). The WEA web-site is www.wea.org.uk

Part B
Adult learning

Learning Direct is the freephone helpline for all learning and career queries.

Tel: 0800 100 900
Web-site: www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/learningdirect/index1.htm

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (England and Wales)
21 De Montfort Street
Leicester LE1 7GE
Tel: 0116 204 4200
Web-site: www.niace.org.uk

NIACE is the national organisation for adult learning. It co-ordinates the annual Adult Learners' Week.

NIACE holds conferences and publishes a wide range of books. Good value is the 'NIACE professional pack' of a year's subscription to the monthly magazine *Adults Learning* and the academic journal *Studies in the Education of Adults*, plus the *Adult Learning Yearbook*, which is a mine of useful information on adult learning (£60 individuals; £80 institutions).
A complete list of publications is available free of charge.

NIACE publications

Clarke A, *How to create effective information and communication technology learning programmes: a guide*, NIACE, 1999, £6.95

O'Rourke P, *Your life, your work, your future – a self-development pack*, NIACE, 1998, £6.00

Community development

CDF

Community Development Foundation (CDF)
60 Highbury Grove
London N4 2AG
Tel: 020 7226 5375
Web-site: www.cdf.org.uk/welcome.htm

Community Education Development Centre
Woodway Park School
Wigston Road
Coventry CV2 2RH
Tel: 024 7665 5700

NEF

New Economics Foundation (NEF)
Cinnamon House
6-8 Cole Street
London SE1 4YH
Tel: 020 7407 7447
Web-site: www.neweconomics.org

NEF publications

Participation works! 21 techniques of community participation for the 21st century, £7.00 (for personal use), £12.00 (for organisation use). Add 10 per cent for p&p.

SCCD Standing Conference for Community Development (SCCD)
356 Glossop Road
Sheffield S10 2HW
Tel: 0114-270-1718
Web-site: www.communities.org.uk/sccd/home.htm

Disability rights

Disability Awareness in Action
11 Belgrave Road
London SW1V 1RB
Tel: 020 7834 0477
Web-site: http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/DAA_ORG

A number of NIACE publications are also relevant.

Ethnic minorities

(Report) *Staring at invisible women: black and minority ethnic women in rural areas.*

National Association of Women's Organisations (Rural Team)
44 Diamond House
37-38 Hatton Garden
London EC1N 8EB
Tel: 020 7242 0878

CRE Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)
Elliot House
10-12 Arlington Street
London SW1E 5EH
Tel: 020 7828 7022

See also NCVO publications, under 'Non-profit organisations', for a report of a CRE survey on rural racism. There are local councils for racial equality in some rural areas and the CRE can inform you of activities in your area.

Government departments and offices

Education and training

DfEE Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT
Tel: 020 7925 5000
Web-site: www.dfee.gov.uk

Rural affairs

The Countryside Agency
John Dower House
Crescent Place
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire GL50 3RA
Tel: 01242 521381
Web-site: www.countryside.gov.uk

The Countryside Agency was formed on 1 April 1999 from the merger of the Rural Development Commission and the Countryside Commission.

Countryside Agency publications

The state of the countryside 1999 – available free from the Countryside Agency. A free publications catalogue is also available on request.

DETR

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR)
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Tel: 020 7890 3000
Web-site: www.detr.gov.uk

DETR publications

Rural England – a discussion document, 1999. A Rural White Paper is due during 2000 which will set out future direction for government policy.

Other government agencies

Office for National Statistics publishes county digests of census material.

Census Marketing
Office for National Statistics
Room No 4300S
Segensworth Road
Titchfield
Fareham
Hampshire PO15 5RR
Tel: 01329 813800
Web-site: www.ons.gov.uk

There are Government Offices for each English region. A full list is contained in the NIACE *Adult Learning Yearbook* or at www.open.gov.uk

European Union

For information about European Union funding and programmes, contact:

European Commission
Jean Monnet House
8 Storey's Gate
London SW1P 3AT
Tel: 020 7973 1992

Non-profit organisations

ACRE

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)
Somerford Court
Somerford Road
Cirencester
Gloucestershire GL7 1TW
Tel: 01285 653477
Web-site: www.acreciro.demon.co.uk

ACRE is the national association of Rural Community Councils. It is a charity which focuses on the needs of rural communities.

ACRE publications

Rural briefing papers, including:

Rural childcare, £1.00
Developing indicators of rural need, £1.50
Young people in rural areas, £1.50
Community care in rural areas, £1.00
Rural poverty – the facts, £1.00
Small schools in rural areas, £1.00

Village hall information sheets, including:

The Children's Act 1989, £2.00
Business Plans, £4.00
Setting up an IT resource centre, £2.00

Doing by learning: a handbook for organisers and tutors of village-based community development courses, 1989, £1.00 (a useful reminder that the best books are not always the most recent!)

The small rural primary school and its community: educating together. A report of the ACRE small schools initiative, 1998

Landscapes of poverty, 1997, £12.99

Health care in rural England, £3.50

Poverty in rural areas: video and booklet pack, £19.95

Community is the key: a good practice guide for building the capacity of rural communities to help themselves, 1999

Rural Arts Handbook, £8.00

Marketing telecottages and teleworking, £5.00

Full publication list available by post or on web-site. ACRE publishes a three-weekly newsletter, *Rural Digest*. Annual subscription £60 per year (16 copies). ACRE has offers on complete sets of information sheets and briefing papers, and can also give you details of your local Rural Community Council.

DSC

Directory of Social Change
24 Stephenson Way
London NW1 2DP
Tel: 020 7209 5151

A number of publications offer guides to national and local trusts and charities, the National Lottery, government departments, the European Union, fund-raising, as well as funding for arts and the environment.

DSC publications

The DIY guide to public relations, £12.50
Vogel S, *First steps on the internet*, £12.99
Full publications list available.

LETS

LETS Development Agency
LETS UK
2 Kent Street
Portsea
Portsmouth PO1 3BS
Tel: 023 9273 0639

Publications include an information pack (£10) and a list of local groups.

NACVS

National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service (NACVS)
Third Floor
Arundel Court
177 Arundel Street
Sheffield S1 2NU
Tel: 0114 278 6636

NCVO

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)
8 All Saints Street
London N1 9RL
Tel: 020 7713 6161

There is a dedicated Rural Team.

NCVO publications

NCVO Rural briefing sheets (free, but send s.a.e.)
Keep them in Birmingham: challenging racism in South West England. Summary of CRE survey findings, 1994
Credit unions and the rural economy, 1998
Telematics, the Internet and rural communities (published 1995 but still useful)
Porter H, *Make yourself heard. A communications strategy for rural voluntary organisations*, £5.00
Barnes L and Gould J, *Strategies for success in rural care: creating effective and accessible health and social care services in rural areas. A practical guide*, £10.00
Barnes L and Brown J, *Fundraising for rural voluntary action*, £10.00

The Rural Stress Information Network
Arthur Rank Centre
Stoneleigh Park
Warwickshire CV8 2LZ
Tel: 024 7641 2916

Set up to tackle the issue of rural stress, the Network now has a number of county support groups.

TCA

The Telework, Telecottage and Telecentre Association (TCA)
Freepost CV2312
Kenilworth
Warwickshire CV8 2RR.
Tel: 0800 616008
Web-site: www.tcawww.org.uk

TCA publications

The teleworking handbook, 2nd edition: new ways of working in the information society, £19.95 plus £2.00 p&p.

Full details of publications and services available on the web-site or by freephone.

Travellers

For information on travellers, contact:

Friends, Families and Travellers Support Group (FFT)
Tel: 01273 234777,
e-mail alex@f-f-t.demon.co.uk

Gypsy Council for Education, Culture, Welfare and Civil Rights.
Tel: 01708 868986

Village appraisals

Bidwell L and Sadler S, *Rural community appraisal handbook*, 1999, Rural community development training partnership and Rural Forum (Scotland)

This book also lists several village appraisal web-sites which you might like to visit. For example, Chulmleigh (Devon) Community Appraisal is available at www.devon-cc.gov.uk/dris/commstat/chulm.html

The Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council have developed a 'software package to help you to understand your local community.' This costs £50 and is available from:

Village Appraisals for Windows® package
Countryside and Community Research Unit
Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education
Francis Close Hall
Swindon Road
Cheltenham GL50 4AZ
Tel: 01242 544083

This guide to rural learning will help those who are developing learning opportunities in the countryside. This might include teachers and programme organisers but it will also be relevant to project and development workers, health and housing workers, and all those in the voluntary sector with an educational brief.

The guide has been organised into four separate sections:

Living in the Countryside – some up-to-date facts and figures and useful information about living in the rural context.

Approaches and Developments – useful and relevant approaches aimed at developing country learning.

Getting Organised – practical suggestions about putting ideas into practice.

Resources – suggestions for further reading, additional learning materials and useful contacts.

NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties and disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

NIACE's website on the internet is http://www.niace.org.uk

NIACE

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